NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Vol. 31 No. 1 $8.00

THE BEST OF THIRTY YEARS

PART II (2000–2014)

THEN

Archivist Laurel Horton prepares a slideshow of items in the Archives of Appalachia. Circa 1984. Photo courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia.

The Archives of Appalachia was dedicated at East Tennessee State University in 1978 to house manuscript, audio, and video collections of Appalachia. In 1998, the Archives moved into a larger space on the fourth floor of Sherrod Library. Preserving and sharing archival materials has changed dramatically in recent decades, making it easier for more people to access these collections.

NOW

Archivist Laura Smith scans a picture from the Archives, making a digital copy that is easy to resize and share. Photo by Charlie Warden.

THE BEST OF THIRTY YEARS
PART II (2000-2014)
Summer 2015
Volume 31, Number 1

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Justice in Appalachia
Deadline for submissions: August 28, 2015

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NOW & THEN
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NOW & THEN
THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

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Editor's Notebook

Fred Sauceman

As a longtime reader of *Now & Then: The Appalachian Magazine*, I never dreamed that I would one day become its editor. I clearly remember the first story of mine that the magazine, under a previous editor, accepted. It was a story, in question-and-answer format, profiling the work of one of my favorite people, Charlie Daniel, the brilliant editorial cartoonist for the *Knoxville News Sentinel*. When I was selected to be the magazine's editor in 2005, I immediately contacted Charlie and asked him if he would contribute a cartoon to brighten the back cover. He readily agreed, and each issue, during my decade-long tenure as editor, has ended with a Charlie Daniel cartoon.

Working with folks like Charlie has made the editorship of this magazine one of the most rewarding highlights of my professional life. I am grateful to ETSU President Emeritus Dr. Paul E. Stanton, Jr., Center for Appalachian Studies and Services Director Dr. Roberta Herrin, and the administration at East Tennessee State University for giving me this life-changing assignment.

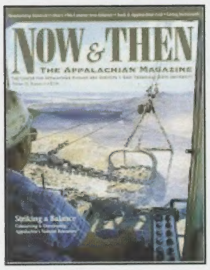
I am a native of Southern Appalachia. I was educated in Southern Appalachia. I have spent my entire career in Southern Appalachia. Especially given that background, it has been a singular honor to tell the varied, complex, touching, troubling, captivating, and noble stories of my native land through these pages.

When the idea of my editing *Now & Then* was first mentioned, I knew immediately the person with whom I wanted to work. At the time, he was my wife's boss, at the Heritage Alliance in Jonesborough, Tennessee. The ETSU hiring process and the stars aligned perfectly, bringing to us Randy Sanders, whose sparkling writing, original artwork, and innovative graphic design skills turned out to be the perfect combination to take the magazine to the next level. Working with Randy has been a great joy.

I am also grateful to the talented graduate students who have worked with us over the years: Sara Peters, Sam Crowe, Heather Jones Cook, Caitlin Chapman-Rambo, and Emily Booker. In 2009, we took another valuable step in hiring a photo editor, Charles Warden, to whom I am most grateful.

To every writer who has contributed a story, every poet whose verse we have included, every photographer whose work we have showcased, I thank you. I appreciate the countless hours devoted to *Now & Then* by poetry editor Linda Parsons Marion, book reviews editor and later poetry editor Marianne Worthington, and book reviews editor Edwina Pendarvis. Each brought a deep respect for Appalachia and its people to the job.

And last, thank you to our readers, whose comments and suggestions have helped us shape the magazine's content, appearance, and philosophy. It takes many hands and hearts to make a magazine. For the lasting personal and professional connections *Now & Then* has created for me, I am blessed and thankful. ❖



"Striking a Balance" (vol. 18, no. 3)

Mountaintop Removal:

Necessity or Nightmare?

Rudy Abramson

Proponents see mountaintop removal as the Appalachian coal industry's best hope for staying competitive. Opponents can hardly contain their outrage.

About sunrise, Willard and Evelyn Kelly hear the bulldozer engines start up on the mountain above their house, followed by the clattering of steel treads in a cacophony that will continue until dusk. Less than a mile from their door, yet another of Logan County, W.Va.'s ridges is being scalped. "Sometimes," says Willard, "it sounds like they're coming right at you."

After the trees and brush are gone and the stumps have been pushed out and the soil has been scraped away exposing solid rock, powerful explosions of petroleum and ammonium nitrate will shatter the rock, and power shovels will begin removing the mountaintop to expose seams of coal. The overburden, as the dirt and rock are called, will be systematically stripped away, and most of it will be dumped into hollows creating "valley fills." Once the layer of coal is removed, the process is repeated. Another 20, 40, 60 or more feet of the mountain will be taken off to reach the next coal deposit.

Never has coal been removed from the Appalachian mountains with such efficiency. Unlike old underground mines that once left half the coal behind in pillars supporting the roof, the mountaintop removal mine leaves virtually none. If the 59 million tons of coal produced by West Virginia surface mines last year, 52 million tons came from mountaintop removal operations like those located all across the Kellys' corner of Logan County.

Ever since they were married 30 years ago, Willard and Evelyn have lived in their own secluded hollow on the left fork of Cow Creek, three miles from the Logan-Mingo County line. They settled as close to nature as they could get. The water in the creek was pure enough to drink back then. The air was crystal clear, and on a still morning, they could hear a rooster crow a mile away. The mountains around them were not much changed since the days when deputy sheriffs and mine guards beat labor organizers in the coalfields and Willard's parents arrived from Southwest Virginia.

In the early 1990s, after their five children were grown and Willard was declared totally disabled from a mining accident, he and Evelyn built their dream house. It stood in the back of the lush bottom where the left fork flows between nearly vertical mountainsides on its way to join other streams tumbling down to Island Creek.

It's a sturdy structure of blue siding with white columns at the front door, the kind of place that neither of them had ever seen or imagined when they were growing up. It has extra insulation, airtight doors and windows, and thick hardwood floors supported by oversized joists set just 16 inches apart. They built it to last, for they expected to live in it the rest of their days watching their grandchildren grow up. The hollow, says

Willard, "was the quietest, most peaceable place you could ever imagine."

Blasting Away

It was.

But soon after the Kellys moved into the new house, blasting started on Mingo Logan Coal Company's Phoenix Mine on a ridge behind them, shattering the peace. Explosions that broke up the rock on the mountain eventually fractured their foundation, opened cracks between the walls and the ceiling, and ruined their well. Thick clouds of dust boiled into the hollow, covering their windows, settling on the porch, regularly making it necessary to wash the whole place down with a hose. In 1996, a deluge that created serious flooding all along Island Creek and its tributaries washed logs, rock, and debris onto their yard, covering their grass with mud and cutting gullies across the property. A bulldozer had to be hired to clean up the mess.

From time to time, whenever new damage was conspicuous, they called the state Department of Environmental Protection to complain about the blasting and dust. Officials extended sympathy but generally did nothing. "They would come out and talk to the coal company, but 90 percent of the time, they would say the blasts were in compliance," Evelyn says, recalling only one occasion when the state concluded that Mingo Logan Coal Company had violated blasting rules. The burden of proof in contested cases rests with aggrieved homeowners.

Now it is generally quiet behind the house, but the Kellys expect the situation to get even worse when blasting starts on the ridge in front, for the base of the mountain is no more than 100 yards from their porch. "We're going to get fly rock and dirt from the blasting," she says, "and our grandkids are going to be in real danger from rock rolling down the hill."

Other families along other Island Creek tributaries are similarly in the shadow of future mine sites, as are scattered residents and hamlets in the hollows of Boone, Fayette, Lincoln, Mingo, Raleigh, Webster, and Wyoming counties, as well as Logan. Because "strip jobs" are growing larger and increasingly impinging on populated areas, mountaintop removal has stirred Central Appalachia's most intense environmental debate since publication of *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, Harry Caudill's indignant expose that brought Appalachian strip mining to national attention in 1962.

Legal Challenges

Lately, environmental groups and emboldened coalfield residents have increasingly taken their issues to federal court, concentrating their legal attacks on state and federal regulators for failing to enforce the 24-year-old federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) and a variety of state and federal regulations. Citing mountaintop mining projects in the Island Creek area, the Huntington, W.Va.-based Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition and the Citizens Coal Council, with offices in Washington, D.C., and Denver, sued to force state and federal regulators to evaluate mountaintop mines' long-term impact on streams more stringently. U.S. District Judge Robert Chambers refused to block a new Mingo Logan mine not far from the Kellys' hollow, noting a need for more compelling evidence, but he has refused to dismiss the case outright, leaving alive an issue with the potential for far-reaching impact.

The litigation over hydrologic assessment follows a far more publicized suit that has put mountaintop removal in headlines and slowed the approval of new mountaintop projects. That particular case was filed by 10 coalfield residents; the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, an old-line conservation and environmental protection group; and Trial Lawyers for Public Justice, a national public interest law firm. U.S. District Judge Charles Haden II ruled that mountaintop removal projects violate the Federal Clean Water Act when their valley fills bury perennial or intermittent streams. The decision, handed down in October 1999, created a political uproar and produced grave warnings that the West Virginia coal industry would be crippled.

The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals subsequently overturned the case on the grounds that Haden had acted beyond his jurisdiction. Specifically, said the court, the Constitution's 11th Amendment did not allow the West Virginia citizens to use the federal court to force the state Department of Environmental Protection to enforce state laws. In October, the plaintiffs appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, though the substance of Haden's controversial ruling was no longer at issue.

The environmentalists' battle against mountaintop removal also goes on in Kentucky. Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC) is a statewide social justice organization that played a leading role in blocking strip mining near Ken-

tucky's highest peak on Harlan County's Black Mountain in 2000. It has more recently sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over its approval of a huge mountaintop mine expansion in Martin County. The London, Ky.-based KFTC claims the permit was illegally issued under a national program for projects with insignificant environmental impact rather than under more stringent local permitting requirements. The planned expansion would create valley fills covering about six miles of streams with headwaters in numerous hollows.

Echoing warnings issued by West Virginia officials after the Haden decision, the president of the Lexington-based Kentucky Coal Association, the state's largest trade association, warned that the suit could "literally shut down the coal mining industry," not only in Eastern Kentucky, but beyond.

Meanwhile, the Kentucky Resources Council (KRC), another environmental advocacy group with central offices in Frankfort, has notified the Corps it plans to sue if the agency grants a pending application for a project near the North Fork of the Kentucky River.

From Mountaintops to Valley Fills

After development of massive new earth-moving equipment, mountaintop removal was introduced to the Appalachians three decades ago and spread across huge acreage in Eastern Kentucky and Southern West Virginia and into Southwest Virginia before serious controversy erupted. Between 1978 and 1998, the state of Kentucky issued 367 permits for mountaintop removal mines, and more than 130—perhaps many more—were approved in Southern West Virginia. By the late 1990s, West Virginia's Department of Environmental Protection was authorizing more projects in a single year than it had during the entire decade of the 1970s or the 1980s. Some of them had grown to more than 2,000 acres, and when juxtaposed, they stretched for miles and altered the landscape, with the ultimate consequences unknown. By 2001, an estimated 300,000 acres of West Virginia forests have been clear-cut, and, by some accounts, valley fills of rock and dirt dumped off mountainsides have buried a thousand miles of West Virginia streams.

Except in Tennessee, the majority of Appalachian coal still comes from underground mines, where mechanization has been as rapid as it has been on the surface. But half a century after the beginning of serious surface mining in the mountains, the outsized earth-moving machines employed in coal basins of the West have replaced contour mines with mountaintop removal in Southern West Virginia, Appalachia's richest coalfields.

The impact on the landscape went largely unnoticed until *U.S. News & World Report* magazine published a devastating spread with photographs of scalped mountains. The accompanying article focused on St. Louis-based Arch Coal, Inc.'s depopulation of communities near its Dal-Tex Mine in Logan County and suggested that mountaintop mines had contributed to destructive flooding.

Made famous by the article and subsequent litigation, the Dal-Tex Mine had opened in the early 1990s, and it closed in 2000 at the height of the controversy. Spread across 6,000 acres of Logan County, the mine had produced as much as 4.4 million tons of coal a year for the country's second largest coal producer. On it operated power shovels that scooped up 50 cubic yards of rock or dirt or coal in a single stroke and a 20-story excavating machine, called a dragline, that took bites the size of a small house, rotated, and dumped them at a distance of nearly two football fields. Trucks raced about with loads of 90 tons each.

Moving Down the Hollow

With the Dal-Tex seams nearly exhausted, Arch proposed to move the equipment down through a hollow near the community of Blair, across West Virginia Highway 17, and onto another ridge. There the company planned a new 3,000-acre mine called Spruce, where it intended to remove 10 seams of coal worth $2 billion. Over 15 years, operations would cut the mountain down by hundreds of feet and bury four miles of streams beneath valley fills rising as high as 600 feet.

But Spruce Mine became the focal point of the lawsuit that led to Judge Baden's ruling restricting valley fills. In the long hollow between Dal-Tex and the planned Spruce Mine, residents of the communities of Blair and Sharples had long endured dust, blasting, and the constant night-and-day roaring of machinery.

The company parried a barrage of complaints. Looking toward years of work ahead on Spruce mine, Arch set out to evacuate the hollow. The company bought out businesses and scores of homeowners. Others filed lawsuits, negotiated financial settlements, and left. Many of the vacated houses burned to the ground. Company employees moved into the others.

Among the stubborn holdouts were Carlos Gore, who stayed

in his house precariously close to Dal-Tex, and James Weekley, who remained in Pigeonroost Hollow, where his family had been for generations and where Arch proposed to place one of the major valley fills from the Spruce Mine. Both became individual plaintiffs in the landmark lawsuit led by the Highlands Conservancy and Trial Lawyers for Public Justice. Indeed the origin of the suit can be traced to the moment when Weekley walked into the Charleston office of environmental lawyer Joseph M. Lovett with a copy of the *U.S. News & World Report* article.

Now, two years after Haden's decision, Arch's dragline Big John sits idle on the edge of the otherwise vacant Dal-Tex Mine while the company again pursues state and federal permits that would allow it to open the new Spruce Mine. Its new applications were filed within days of the appellate court's reversal of Haden.

Outrage

Environmental activists grope for words to express their indignation over mountaintop removal. Brent Blackwelder, president of the Washington, D.C.-based organization, Friends of the Earth, calls it "the most flagrant form of environmental abuse in the country." Ken Hechler—a former congressman, former West Virginia Secretary of State, and implacable foe of strip mining—likens reclamation of mined sites to "putting lipstick on a corpse."

At the root of the conflict between environmentalists and the industry, says Tom Fitzgerald, director of the KRC, "is an arrogance that has afflicted this industry since the sixties. This is an industry that has never recognized the legitimacy of the 1977 SMCRA. Other industries carp about controls, but they recognize the regulation is a part of the cost of doing business. The coal industry refuses to accept the legitimacy of anybody limiting or curtailing them or enjoying any rights that stand in the way of coal's interests," says Fitzgerald.

Anticipating backlash, the coal industry at first characterized mountaintop removal as a public service, predicting that plateaus left behind would become sites for industrial developments, housing projects, and golf courses. One ad played off of *Field of Dreams*, a popular movie in which an Iowa cornfield is transformed into a baseball diamond graced by immortals of the game.

But the vision has not panned out.

The SMCRA requires that mined sites be restored to their approximate original contour. Given the daunting task of restoring the contour of a mountaintop site, the law allows operators to be excused from the requirement, provided that they protect the site's value by putting it in condition for commercial, industrial, agricultural or recreational use.

But many operators have merely hydroseeded thousands of acres of naked plateaus and labeled them wildlife habitat. Although not federally recognized, state regulators for years accepted these grassy plateaus as acceptable post-mine land use. Experts estimate that it will take 150 to 200 years for forests to be re-established.

But reclamation is demonstrably possible. Placing removed overburden back in the area from whence it came can reduce the size of valley fills and restore a rough approximation of the original contour. Forestry experts at Virginia Tech and elsewhere have demonstrated promising strategies for developing commercial forests on mountaintop removal sites.

Arch Coal's huge Hobet 21 Mine located near Madison, W.Va., has been made a showpiece, an agreeable new landscape of restored hillsides and wetlands populated by a variety of wildlife. The site has won reclamation awards and recognition from wildlife organizations, and it provided the industries with a public relations coup when Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt visited in August 1996 and proclaimed it proof that mining and environmental values can co-exist. "In some ways," Babbitt said during his visit, "it is a better landscape than it was before. It is a more diverse landscape—a savanna of forests coming back, of fields, of open spaces."

A Necessity?

Still, it has attracted no industrial complex or real estate development. Indeed, critics point to Hobet 21 to debunk the very notion that mining's manufactured flatlands are needed. "The idea that land value is enhanced by mountaintop removal is fiction," says John McFerrin, a former president of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. "Just look at Hobet 21. It is just out of Charleston, the land has a rail spur on it, and it is within 100 yards of a four-lane highway. If any place in the world is suitable for an industrial site, that should be it."

A few reduced mountaintops have indeed been put to use. In West Virginia, there is a little-used airport on a former mountaintop in Logan County, a shopping mall in Logan County, a prison in Fayette

County, and a school in McDowell County. Outside Prestonsburg, Ky., a spectacular 18-hole golf course has been completed, and upscale housing and industrial development are promised, following a decade of debate and more than $20 million in state economic development support.

Having seen its development predictions go largely unfulfilled, the industry now focuses on an argument that mountaintop removal is a necessity, that it must be done in order for Appalachia to compete with Western mines, provide jobs, and assure the survival of the coal industry in the region. In the Powder River Basin of Wyoming, coal can be mined for $3.50 a ton, compared to more than $20 per ton in Appalachia, and consequently Western coal is now burned in utility boilers in Georgia, Alabama, and other places where Appalachian coal held a monopoly until recent years.

Environmentalists scoff at the suggestion that mountaintop mines produce jobs crucial to the economy. The process, they say, does the reverse. Employment in the mines of Central Appalachia has plummeted. Sixty years ago, 130,000 miners dug 126 million tons of coal per year in West Virginia. In 1979, it took 58,000 miners to produce 112 million tons. At the turn of the century, the state's mining work force had declined to a little more than 15,000 and production had increased to 170 million tons. In producing 52 million tons of coal, mountaintop mines employed about 2,000 workers. Machines, such as Arch's Big John, have walked on stage as the last characters in the drama of coal's transformation from a labor-intensive to a capital-intensive industry, replacing the mythical "steel driving man."

Waiting and Hoping

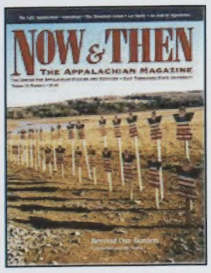
In December 2000, Willard and Evelyn Kelly offered their dream house for sale. Two or three people called, but clearly they expected a bargain. Before the year ended, the sign was taken down. "You put your house up for sale around a strip job, and you don't get many offers," says Evelyn Kelly. "When we told them we had to have what we've got in it, they weren't interested." Nor have Mingo Logan Coal Company or Arch, its corporate parent, expressed any interest.

This does not mean that Arch will never offer to take the Kellys' dream house off their hands. After all, remember that it is only 15 miles across the mountains to Blair and Sharples where the company decided to evacuate communities in anticipation of the opening of the Spruce Mine.

So Willard and Evelyn wait and hope.

If the coal company makes them a reasonable offer, they will sadly leave their dream house in the hollow. Their only alternative is to hold out through more dust and blasting and wait for the machines to take all the nearby coal and leave Cow Creek peaceable again. ❖

Rudy Abramson was a journalist and writer of Appalachia. He was the founder of the *Daily Yonder* and co-editor of the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*.



"Beyond Our Borders"
(vol. 19, no. 1)

Raised to Leave

Lee Smith

Novelist Lee Smith remembers the old days when for Appalachians "getting culture" meant leaving home.

I was born in a rugged ring of mountain in Southwest Virginia—mountains so high, so straight up and down that the sun didn't even hit our yard until about eleven o'clock.

My uncle Bob—they lived across the road—used to predict the weather by sticking his head out the window and hollering back inside, "Sun on the mountaintop, girls!" to my cousins. The only flat land in the county lay in a narrow band along the river. Though we all "ate out of the garden," real farming was impossible in this "hard rock ground." The only thing it produced was coal.

We never thought of our jagged mountains as scenic either, though we all played up in them every day after school, making forts and clubhouses and swinging on grapevines until they rang the bell to call us home for supper. We never saw a tourist, and nobody we knew hiked for fun.

I will never forget the first time I ever saw a jogger: My mother and I were sitting on the front porch stringing beans and watching the cars go up and down Route 460 in front of our house when suddenly one of these VISTAs we'd been hearing about, a long-haired boy with great legs, came running right up the road. We both stood up and watched him until he was out of sight. "Well, for heaven's sakes," my mother said. "Where do you reckon he's going, running like that?"

He was going back to where he came from eventually, but most of us weren't going anyplace. We were closed in entirely, cut off from the outside world by our ring of mountains. Many of the children I went to school with had never been out of Buchanan County. My own mother was referred to as a "foreigner" at her funeral, though it had been over fifty years since she had first come there to teach home economics and married my daddy. She's spent those years trying to civilize him and his whole unruly clan, but it was a challenge.

So I was being raised to leave.

I was not to use double negatives. I was not to say "me and Martha." I was not to trade my pimento cheese sandwiches at school for the lunch I really wanted: cornbread and buttermilk in a Mason jar, brought by the kids from the hollars. Me and Martha were not to play in the black river behind our house, dirty with the coal they were washing upstream.

I was to take piano lessons from the terrifying Mrs. Ruth Boyd, even though I had no aptitude for it. I was to play "Claire de Lune" at my piano recital, wearing an itchy pink net evening dress. I was not to like the mountain music that surrounded us on every side, from the men playing banjo and mandolin on the sidewalk outside my daddy's dime store on Saturdays to Martha's father playing his guitar down on the riverbank after dinner to Johnny Cash singing "Ring of Fire" on our brand new radio station, WNRG.

But here, my mother ran into serious trouble for I loved this music. I had been born again to "Angel Band," sung high and sweet at a tent revival that I snuck out to go to, and I had a dobro-playing boyfriend—with Nashville aspirations.

Even my mother enjoyed going to the drive-in theater on Saturday evenings in the summer to hear Ralph and Carter Stanley, two brothers from over in Dickenson County, play and sing their bluegrass music on top of the square concrete-block concession stand. "I never will marry, I'll take me no wife; I intend to live single, all of my life," Ralph wailed mournfully, followed by their fast instrumental version of "Shout, Little Lulie." Old people were clogging on the patch on concrete in front of the window where you bought your Cokes and popcorn; little kids were swinging on the iron-pipe swing set. Whole families ate the fried chicken and deviled eggs they'd brought from home, sitting on quilts on the grass. My boyfriend reached over and squeezed my sweaty hand. The Stanley Brothers' nasal voices rose higher than the gathering mist, higher than the lightning bugs that rose from the trees along the river as night came on. When it got full dark, the Stanley Brothers climbed down off the concession stand, and we all got into our cars and the movie came on.

I loved that music, just as I loved my grandmother's corn pudding and those scary old stories my Uncle Vern told. But this hillbilly music didn't have anything to do with "culture," as I was constantly being reminded. No, "culture," was someplace else, and when the time came, I would be sent off to get some. Culture lived in big cities like Richmond and Washington and Paris and Boston and London and New York—especially in New York, especially in places like Carnegie Hall.

Carnegie Hall . . . where on June 9th of 2001, I stood on my $100 balcony seat and screamed as 74-year-old Dr. Ralph Stanley and the rest of the traditional musicians and singers on the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack played to a sold-out house. That CD has been phenomenally successful both in this country and abroad.

Elvis Costello was the emcee. Joel and Ethan Coen, the film-makers who made the *O Brother* movie, were in the audience, along with T-Bone Burnett, its musical director. The Coen brothers had written a note aimed at this New York audience about the music in the program: "These songs were for the most part created by people whose lives were hard and horizons narrow. Their lives were not like ours. All that urges their music on us is its humanity. . . And yet, this soundtrack went platinum without receiving any airplay: pop stations considered it too country, and country stations considered it too . . . country."

On stage at Carnegie Hall, the Fairfield Four sang their stark treatment of "Po' Lazarus." Dan Tyminski, the voice of George Clooney in the film, tore it up on "I Am a Man of Constant Sorrow." The Cox family, fresh from Louisiana with Daddy still in a wheelchair following an accident, brought down the house with "Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown?" Reigning bluegrass princess Alison Krauss fiddled up a storm, then sang "When I Go Down to the River to Pray" in a tight harmony with Gillian Welch and Emmylou Harris. They sang so sweet, they could have been angels. They made us all cry with the beautiful "Who Will Sing for Me?" which they had just performed at John Hartford's funeral.

The little Peasall sisters—Sarah, age 13, Hannah, age 10, and Leah, age 8—wore patent leather shoes and bows in their hair to sing "In the Highways and the Hedges, I'll Be Somewhere Listening for My Name." Welch's husband, David Rawlings, teamed up with her on a knockout version of "I Want to Sing That Rock and Roll." Other songs were sung by performers in other combinations, usually accompanied by the peerless Jerry Douglass on dobro.

But the night belonged to Ralph Stanley, who came out last, all by himself, and took center stage to give his famous a capella rendition of the terrifying "O Death," with all lights black except for a single spotlight trained directly on him. "O Death, O Death, won't you spare me over for another year?" His high, haunting voice filled the huge dark hall. The song lasted for five minutes, followed by almost a full moment of total silence. Then pandemonium broke loose. The stage lights went up, the house lights went on, all the other performers rushed out on stage, and the standing ovation went on and on.

Although he loves to poke fun at his own success—recently referring to the movie as "O Brother, Where Art Thou At?"—Dr. Ralph Stanley has come a long way from the top of the concession stand at the Grundy Drive-In Theater. A six-time Grammy nominee and a Grand Ole Opry member, Stanley picked up his honorary

doctorate in music from Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tenn. He was the first recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities' Traditional American Music Award, and he performed at the inaugurations of both Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. On April 24, 2001, he was awarded the Library of Congress Living Legend Medal; his fellow inductees included baseball great Hank Aaron, Secretary of State Colin Powell, folk musician Pete Seeger, and violinist Isaac Stern.

It seems to me that Dr. Ralph's Carnegie Hall appearance symbolizes something that is happening to Appalachian culture as a whole. Now, everybody in the region realizes that we don't have to go anyplace else to "get culture." Every little town has its own festival, celebrating itself with local music, food, and crafts—whether it's called a "blackberry festival" or a "ramp festival" or a "wooly worm contest" or a "gingerbread day" or a "fiddling convention." Fueled by a nationally, politically correct appreciation of whatever is still ethnically or geographically or culturally distinct, America as a whole is coming to appreciate and value its differences. Everybody understands that our own Appalachian culture is as rich and as diverse in terms of history, arts, crafts, literature, folklore, and music, for instance, as any other area in this country.

In fact, we are richer than most. Our formidable geography acted as a natural barrier for so long, I think—keeping others out, holding us in, allowing for the development of our rich folk culture, our distinctive speech patterns, our strong sense of tradition, and our radical individualism. Appalachian people are more rooted than other Southerners. We still live in big extended families that spoil children and revere old people. We will talk your ears off. We still excel at storytelling—and I mean everybody, not just some old guy in overalls at a folk festival. I mean the woman who cuts your hair, I mean your doctor, I mean your mother. Our great music is country music—which was always working class, from its beginnings in the old-time string bands and ballads right up through honky-tonk and the high lonesome sound of bluegrass to present-day glitzy Nashville and then all the way back around to this revival of traditional music we're currently enjoying.

Look at Dolly Parton, now a national icon. "I had to get rich to sing this poor," she has said, referring to the success of her last two albums, *The Grass Is Blue*, her take on traditional bluegrass, and the recent *Little Sparrow*, which is old-time, or what she calls her "blue mountain music." Look at Lucinda Williams and Steve Earle and Patti Loveless.

And what about our recent literature? No one could deny that there is a veritable explosion of Appalachian writing today. And a lot of it is hitting the bestseller lists, too. This means it is being read, and widely read, outside the region. I'm talking about Charles Frazier's Civil War novel, *Cold Mountain*, for instance, set in Western North Carolina; about Silas House's wonderful *Clay's Quilt*; about Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*, which takes place near Emory, Va.; about *Rocket Boys*, both the memoir and the movie; about Sharyn McCrumb's ballad novels and Robert Morgan's *Gap Creek*, which even got "Oprah-fied," as did Gwyn Hyman Rubio's Eastern Kentucky novel *Icy Sparks*. There's Jan Karon's Mitford series, which is at least *sort of* Appalachian, even though it's Episcopal, since these books are set in Blowing Rock, N.C.; and I'm certainly talking about Adriana Trigiani's comic novel, *Big Stone Gap*, and its recent sequel, *Big Cherry Holler*. *Big Stone Gap* is soon to be a major motion picture, filmed in Big Stone Gap, Va., and directed by Trigiani herself, with Roseanne Cash as its musical director. The film *Songcatcher* traces the adventures of a Boston musicologist who comes to visit her crusading lesbian sister at a settlement school in Madison County, N.C., and sets about "catching"—or transcribing—all the local ballads. Maybe the plot's a little melodramatic and a little too complicated, but the soundtrack is terrific, featuring Sheila Kay

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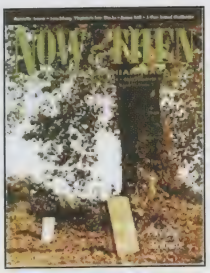
Adams, Hazel Dickens, and Iris DeMent, among others.

Clearly, I could go on and on, and I'm not even really getting into visual arts or poetry or design or drama or documentary film. My point is that mainstream American culture is being "Appalachian-ized." No matter what you think of NASCAR, for instance—our most successful Appalachian export—it's fast taking over the whole country.

I'm of two minds about all this. I was country, remember, when country wasn't cool. I don't really like to see my favorite places and people be "discovered." I'd rather be sitting on poet Lou Crabtree's porch in Abington, Va., in the cool of the evening, talking to her, than hear her interviewed by Noah Adams on NPR. I'd rather drive up a lonely stretch of road near our cabin in Ashe County, N.C., than shop at the brand-new Wal-Mart they're putting in there. (I'd planned to stick with Ray's Hardware in West Jefferson myself, but guess what? It just went out of business.)

Even though I, personally, sometimes wish I could be back in the simpler, saner, safer world of my childhood, eating a piece of fried chicken on a quilt at the drive-in theater while Ralph Stanley plays music on top of the concession stand, I know I can't. The drive-in is long gone, and so am I. But I'll tell you something else—I was mighty proud to be there the night Dr. Ralph played at Carnegie Hall. ❖

Lee Smith is an award-winning novelist of thirteen books and four collections of short stories. Her latest novel is *Guests on Earth*. She currently lives in North Carolina.



"Paying Tribute"
(vol. 19, no. 3)

The Hand That Wrote *The Dollmaker:*

A Tribute to Harriette Arnow

Silas House

Let us now praise a not-famous-enough woman.

Although most readers of Appalachian literature consider Harriette Arnow to be one of the matriarchs of 20th-century literature, her name is not spoken in the same sentences with writers such as Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Porter, or Eurdora Welty.

It should be.

At one time, it seemed as if this would indeed be the case. Most people don't realize that Arnow's *The Dollmaker* not only spent 31 weeks as a national bestseller but also took second place to no less than William Faulkner when his *A Fable* won the National Book Award in 1954. Earlier, in 1949, Arnow's second book, *Hunter's Horn,* beat out George Orwell's now revered *1984* for the *Saturday Review*'s Best Novel Award. In 1971, novelist Joyce Carol Oates cited *The Dollmaker* as "our most unpretentious American masterpiece." The same year, Tillie Olsen, best known for her classic short story collection *Tell Me a Riddle,* identified Arnow as a writer whose "books of great worth suffer the death of being unknown."

No matter, fame. Arnow was not concerned with it herself and would surely scoff at the thought of this article wasting time dwelling upon such matters. Instead, the focus ought to be on the woman who wanted nothing more than to be a writer.

Life of a Writer

Harriette Louise Simpson was born in Wayne County, Ky., on July 7, 1908. Her family had been in the region for more than five generations, and she later expressed a debt to them for her storytelling skills. She wrote her first short story at the age of nine, while in the fourth grade, and once said that she "never got over it." Both her parents, Mollie Jane and Elias Thomas Simpson, were teachers, and an aunt was the school superintendent, so the family put a great store by education, which led the young Harriette Simpson to attend the Berea Foundation School (later Berea College) and the University of Louisville. Instead of studying literature, she majored in science—earning a teaching certificate from Berea and a bachelor of science from the University of Louisville—perhaps in part to satisfy her family. "Mother insisted that we girls be teachers," she once told Kentucky journalist Al Smith in a television interview.

After a brief stint as a teacher, Arnow decided that she was going to follow her lifelong dream of being a writer. In 1934, she moved to Cincinnati, where she felt she could more fully devote herself to her chosen profession. There she worked odd jobs—as a waitress, library clerk, assistant for the Federal Writer's Project—to make ends meet. "I would save until I had enough to quit, live on that awhile as I wrote, then run out of money and go get another job," she said.

It did not take long before her talent was noticed. Her second story, "The Washerwoman's Day," appeared in *The Southern Review,* edited by Robert Penn Warren. She felt most validated by the additional thrill of being paid $25 for her story. Other stories followed in such magazines as *Kosmos* and *The Atlantic.* Arnow once submitted a story to *Esquire* using her brother-in-law's photo and only her initials—H. L. Simpson because she noticed that men were writing most of the magazine's pieces. "It was wrong of me to do that," she later said, with a barely detectable grin.

Only two years after moving north, she published her first novel, *Mountain Path,* in 1936. The novel

garnered strong reviews from critics but was not a commercial success. These reviewers set the tone for much of her literary career. While they thought the book was brilliant, they also made note of its regionalism.

In 1939 she married journalist Harold Arnow, and after an attempt at making a living as writers and farmers in the Cumberland foothills of Kentucky, they moved to Detroit, a city that would serve as the setting for *The Dollmaker*. In Detroit, she wrote *Hunter's Horn*—published in 1949, 13 years after her first novel. The book quickly became a bestseller and won the respect of critics all across the nation. In 1951, the Arnows moved to Ann Arbor, Mich., where Harriette wrote most of her masterpiece, *The Dollmaker*, published in 1954 to wide critical acclaim.

After the success of *The Dollmaker*, Arnow turned her keen eye to nonfiction, producing such books as *Seedtime on the Cumberland* in 1960 and *Flowering of the Cumberland* in 1963, both studies of her native Cumberland River region.

These two books are often said to provide the definitive history of the European settlement of the area as well as a framework for Appalachian history. A 1970 novel entitled *The Weedkiller's Daughter* marked her long-awaited return to fiction. This was followed by her last major work, a 1974 historical novel called *The Kentucky Trace*. In 1977, she published *Old Burnside*, a memoir that is beloved by her readers, though Arnow considered it her worst book.

Arnow received a resurgence of interest in 1984 after the widely watched television broadcast of a movie based upon her most famous book. Jane Fonda starred in the three-hour version of *The Dollmaker* and won an Emmy for her portrayal of its heroine, Gertie Nevels.

In her lifetime, Arnow became known as a writer whose themes were ahead of her time. She often wrote about strong women and always had a social and cultural message to share with her readers. More than anything else, Arnow showed the world the gradual opening up of Appalachia as the region became more modernized and less isolated. At the core of all Arnow's work is an acute attention to the human spirit. She wrote about human beings and the interactions between them, and managed to capture all of that in a way that few writers have.

Only two years after the new attention brought on by Fonda's television movie, Harriette Arnow died in 1986 from heart disease, less than a year after her husband's death. "Characteristically, she was on the family farm," says George Brosi, current editor of *Appalachian Heritage* and a friend of Arnow's. "She didn't die in the hospital on a machine. She died surrounded by flowers she had planted."

At Hindman

Arnow is remembered as an outspoken, intelligent, and independent woman who possessed a dry wit. Brosi calls Arnow "perhaps the best writer to have ever emerged from the Appalachian South" and believes he knows why her work isn't nationally known as widely as it should be. "She wasn't a good self-promoter. She just could not gush up to people she had no respect for," Brosi says. "She was an unreconstructed hillbilly, so the national promoters didn't push her. Because she was unapologetically on the left politically, the Kentucky chauvinists didn't push her either."

From the inception in 1977 of the Appalachian Writers Workshop at the Hindman Settlement School, Arnow was a pivotal part of its staff. She came to the workshop at the invitation of her close friend, poet Albert Stewart. Arnow and James Still were the first people to teach the fiction sessions at the workshop, and she stayed on staff for the next eight years, right up until her death.

In its earliest years, the staff members received the manuscripts submitted by workshop participants on the first night of the workshop and they had no length restrictions. Arnow sometimes had to read whole novel manuscripts over the course of only two days. "She read every word. She must have sometimes stayed up all night," novelist and poet George Ella Lyon writes in *Crossing Troublesome*, a new anthology celebrating 25 years of the Writers Workshop that she edited with poet Leatha Kendrick.

Mike Mullins, executive director of the Hindman Settlement School, says, "Participants told me that a critiquing session with Mrs. Arnow was one of the most frightening experiences that they had ever had but also one of the most rewarding. They all said they felt they had gotten their money's worth for the workshop once they had met with her."

Her Legacy

"She was small, quick, intense, keen," says Lyon. "A passionate, fierce teacher. She liked bourbon and branch water. She dressed simply, was an extremely hard worker who wrote out of a historical, social, and political consciousness. She had a sense of humor so low-key, you had to look again to see if she meant it. Then you would catch the smile in her eyes."

"One of my favorite memories is of her sitting on the floor in the comer of the living room, with a cigarette in one hand and a glass of bourbon and ice in the other," says Mullins. "She was just listening to the conversations that were taking place."

"Harriette was brusque," says Brosi. "In her case, this made her delightful because what irritated her were exactly the things that would be vexing to everybody, but that more shallow people miss. The depth of her insights about people and how they work is unexcelled. Her writing illustrates perhaps more strongly than that of any other 20th-century American writer how society's dysfunctions impact individuals."

Sandra Ballard, the editor of *Appalachian Journal,* is widely considered to be the authoritative voice on Arnow. She met her only once and recalls that event with a sense of awe that is still very much evident. Ballard read *Hunter's Horn* and was so overwhelmed that she devoured everything else that Arnow had written. "When I finished that book, I couldn't get it out of my head," she says. Ballard was so fascinated by Arnow's writing that she also read everything she could about the writer and eventually formed friendships with many of Arnow's family members and friends.

Presently she is at work on an eagerly awaited biography of Arnow. "Her work shows us the human costs of poverty, of obsessions, and of migration," Ballard says. "She gave us an unforgettable picture of what happened to Americans who stayed home during World War II."

Among Ballard's prized possessions is a photocopy of a tracing James Still did of Arnow's hand. "He didn't have a camera but instead had the habit of making a memento by tracing the hand of a person who came to visit him. He had Harriette to sign the tracing," Ballard recounts in *Crossing Troublesome.* "She dated it August 9, 1961, and he wrote along the top of the page, 'The hand that wrote *The Dollmaker.*' "

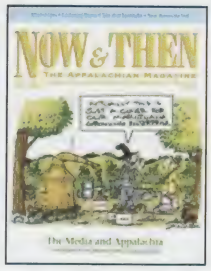
In 1999, the University Press of Michigan posthumously published another novel, *Between the Flowers.* Rabid fans, who were still hungry for more, snatched the book up. Today, interest is still rising. The National Endowment for the Arts recently approved a generous grant to fund the Harriette Arnow Tourism Project, which will include an annual Arnow lecture at Somerset Community College in Kentucky. At Somerset, well-known writers will not only read from their own work and talk about Arnow but will also read from her work. The project is also striving to make people more aware of Arnow's writing and provide information for those interested in knowing more about Arnow's life. Bev Olert, director of the project, says, "We want to make sure her spirit is kept alive. We have lots of different ideas about promoting her work and using her books to promote cultural tourism in the region of her birth."

Olert says it is obvious that more people admire Arnow's work than we realize. "Her gravesite near Keno, Ky., is constantly being visited by readers," she says, even though Arnow's survivors haven't opened the family's farm to the public. "Although the location of her grave is a well-guarded secret, Arnow's fans are determined people. They always manage to find it."

Arnow has instructed generations of writers to be themselves and to present their culture in an accurate, honest way, warts and all. Arnow was never ashamed of where she was from—in fact, she was incredibly proud of her roots. On the other hand, she also never shied away from the problems—sometimes self-imposed—that plagued Appalachia. Her work, although firmly anchored in place, transcended any regional boundaries, and she was one of the first so-called "Appalachian writers" who accepted that her work could be universal.

Although her fans wish that more people knew Arnow's work, in many ways, it seems appropriate that Arnow is not more widely known. She didn't write to be on the bestseller lists or to be included in the literary canon or to be idolized by millions. She wrote because she couldn't not write, because she had plenty to say. She wrote because she loved the written word and the power it held. This is her legacy—the words. ❖

Silas House is the nationally bestselling author of five novels, including *Clay's Quilt* and *Eli the Good,* as well as three plays and one book of creative nonfiction. House is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times* and is a former commentator for NPR's *All Things Considered.* He serves as the NEH Chair of Appalachian Studies at Berea College.



"The Media and Appalachia" (vol. 21, no. 1)

Writing on Appalachia:

Beauty, Strength, and Stereotype

Rick Bragg

It is rarely an overt thing, the snobbery of words. I don't even think it is, much of the time, intentional. Instead, it is usually just a moment of clumsiness, but one that—once committed to the permanence of a newspaper or a magazine story, or a sliver of film—lasts and smarts forever.

People should know better than to use stereotype as a metaphor, should know better than to poke fun at someone because they are from a part of the country that has more haunted ridges than museums, more coal mines than subway tunnels.

The idea of Appalachia, which includes everything from the Ohio River Valley to the hill-country South, will always conjure certain stereotypes. The sad part is that, most the time, those doing the conjuring don't even know they are doing it.

I teach writing part time at a Southern university and will never forget a story turned in by a young man—a promising writer—that quoted a blue-collar worker from Tennessee. In the story, the young writer described the worker as speaking and smiling from "behind a smattering of teeth."

I stared at it for a long time on the paper.

How, I wondered, do I show the young man how wrong it is, and how much potential for pain such words carry, for my people?

I guess I should have just told him a little family history.

I should have told him that I grew up in the foothills of Appalachia, raised by people who picked cotton with their hands, who staggered sweat-soaked from the textile mill with lint clinging to them like Spanish moss.

I should have told him my aunts worked sewing plants, my uncles worked pipe shops and steel, that I drove to football games behind lumbering coal trucks and broke down truck tires with a chisel and a 10-pound sledge.

I should have told him I ate hot cornbread and cold buttermilk from a jelly glass and potted meat on saltine crackers, that my momma cut the toes out of her $2 sneakers to make homemade sandals and waited to eat until her three sons were done, so we could have the best of what was there.

I should have told him my grandfather made whiskey and fist-fought the Georgia Highway Patrol across beer joints floors, that my grandmother knew her Bible by heart and could cuss like it was going out of style.

I should have told him that Hank Williams, not Tennessee Williams, was our scribe and our prophet, but who we really worshipped was a man named Bear.

I should have told him that I had watched women divine their future in coffee grounds from a turned-over cup, that when my people were in need of prayer they would press their hands to the warm, plastic skin of a black and white television, then send a dollar they couldn't spare to men whose ministries inevitably succumbed to the very sin they preached against.

I should have told him I smoked rabbit tobacco, which smelled like burning trash, that I walked across frozen ground and tore my hands and legs on saw briars, chasing the beautiful voice of a blue tick hound to one tree among millions, to shine a flashlight into the branches and see the red eyes of a possum staring back at me.

I should have told him I raced a Camaro to the edge of destruction on Highway 21 and drove dump trucks loaded with stumps and boulders across mountain roads, my right-hand tapping, nervous, on the Georgia

overdrive, that I chopped up rattlesnakes in the pine barrens with a touch—just a touch—of a Poulan chainsaw, as we cleared the land for subdivisions of light vinyl siding.

I should have told him that I have a little brother in prison, that I have another brother who worked 15 years in a factory until it shut down and laid him off, that I think a fist to the mouth is a good answer when a man insults you.

I should have told him that the poverty of the land, worst in the Great Depression but a fact of life for generations, had left tiny graves in a thousand hilltop cemeteries, that generations of men and women had coughed themselves to death with black lung and brown lung, but that even as the mills and the mines chewed up the people, they cherished the work, because it was their salvation.

I should have told him a lot of things, but I didn't.

I told him to try to avoid such things in the future, and then I told him that a man does not smile behind teeth, really, because a person smiles with the muscles of their face, not their jawbone.

And then I moved on to the next paper, and the next.

That same week, I rode a small jet plane to West Virginia. The plane, with seats designed for contortionists and other circus performers, dropped out of steel-gray clouds and fluttered for a moment on the updraft from mountains that seemed to reach for the landing gear.

These were not real mountains, people here scoffed, just hills, but as the plane settled into it approach, still tipping a bit from side to side, I noticed that the runway was really just a mountain with its top hacked off.

"This," I thought, as the plane touched down, "is what it feels like to land on an aircraft carrier."

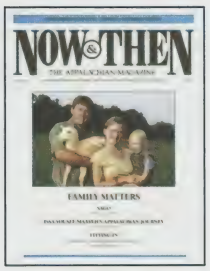
Later, as I rode through the valleys and along the ridgelines with a friend from Charleston, I knew that I was a poor teacher.

I had told my students to write with a sense of place. What a pretentious thing.

What I had meant was, write about a place with rich language, with imagery and detail. Write in color, I told them.

But I forget to tell them to ignore the stereotypes—descriptions as vivid as any new, fresh, original images—to ignore the stereotypes that were burned into their minds, like overexposed film. ❖

Rick Bragg is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author. He left *The New York Times* in 2003 and has since written a biography of Jessica Lynch entitled *I'm a Soldier, Too*. Bragg was born and raised in Alabama and says he learned to tell stories from the masters—the people of the foothills of the Appalachians.



"Family Matters"
(vol. 22, no. 1)

Sago

Fred Sauceman

Archie and Cheryl Snyder had finished their coffee on Monday morning, January 2, 2006, but they hadn't yet turned on the television. The phone rang, and it was Brenda Koerner. She called pretty regularly about matters at the Good Hope Tabernacle, in the Adrian community, just below Buckhannon, West Virginia. But she usually didn't call this early. And it was odd to hear from her on a Monday. She and Cheryl had just talked at services the day before.

"We've had our first catastrophe of the year, and we need to start a prayer chain," Brenda told Cheryl. She said some miners were trapped in Sago, but that's all she knew.

It hadn't been two weeks since Archie had seen Junior Hamner down at the Kroger, and Junior had told him somebody was going to get killed up there at the Anker mine.

Cheryl and Archie knew just about everybody who worked at Anker, which had just been taken over by another company, ICG, January 1. Some of these miners were blood relatives of the Snyders. Cheryl and Archie didn't go down to the Sago Baptist Church that day like a lot of folks in Upshur County did. Instead, they felt they could do more good on the phone, seeking prayers from fellow parishioners.

Archie knew his third cousin, Casey Snyder, was supposed to be on the job that day, working the midnight crew. But a supervisor had called and changed the schedule, so Casey was safe at home.

Archie knew full well that he himself, an electrician and a certified mine boss, might have been checking the wiring in the Sago mine that morning, had it not been for a previous heart attack and five bypasses, which seemed, suddenly, a strange blessing.

Melba Black picked up the phone that Monday morning, too, and she was shaken. Her husband worked the mines, and she had called Josephine Linger, a clerk at Sago Baptist Church, to ask if the sanctuary and fellowship hall ought to be opened.

"It was about 9:00, and I opened up the doors and started coffee, thinking at the time it wouldn't be much," Josephine told me a little over a month later, as she and her husband Ron, a church trustee, cleaned the fellowship hall. "It turned out to be a lot. Other ladies came in from the church, bringing doughnuts, cookies, and cakes. Then after that, people started coming through the door, just a few at a time. And by afternoon, our church was filling up, and from there, we fixed food people brought in. There were so many places that donated food, and we would have never imagined it would have turned out like that, but we stayed in the kitchen most of the time, a lot of us ladies, and we brought food to the people and served them."

When the church's refrigerator couldn't hold any more, the local Lowe's donated one. The coffee pot gurgled all night. The coffee was for the warming, not the waking. Folks paced and hugged and prayed. They didn't sleep.

Families stayed in that church forty-one hours, as the worst West Virginia mining disaster since 1968 unfolded down the hill in the dark.

It was in 1968 when Roger Perry lost a leg digging house coal. As a small child, he had learned to hack coal chunks out of old abandoned mines with a pick and take them home for the furnace. A high wall collapsed on him, crushing his leg so badly it couldn't be saved. Yet Roger's been a coal miner all his life, as mobile and stout as his coworkers.

Roger and his team were down deep in the Sago mine at 6:30 in the morning on January 2, 2006, 500 feet closer to the explosion than the thirteen miners who were trapped.

"We went in about 6:00 in the morning," Roger told me on a snowy Saturday in his living room in the Mud Lick Run Community just north of Buckhannon. "We

had to go about two miles to get to the working place. At 6:30, I was to throw a switch on the track to make a turn into our working station. We stopped and I got out of the mantrip (a car used to transport miners) and threw the switch. I got back in the mantrip and sat down. Then came a hurricane-like wind, with dust and rock blowing out of nowhere. But there was no sound. I couldn't see anything. It blew five to eight seconds. Then I started feeling heat, and I knew then it was an explosion, not a fall. I said, 'Guys, there's been an explosion. Let's get out of here.' I got out of the mantrip, but I couldn't see, just feel. My light broke, and I felt my way down the track on a coal rib, to get to the intake air. We put our self-rescuers on and started walking toward the outside to find clean air. I knew there were men back in there somewhere. I stopped and looked back. There was nothing I could do. My light was broke, and there was too much smoke and dust. I heard another mantrip, and he took us outside, where they told us what happened. I went to St. Joseph's Hospital in Buckhannon to get the dirt flushed from my eyes, then over to the church to listen for updates."

As glad as Roger's wife Donna was when she learned he'd gotten out of the mine with nothing worse than a faceful of coal dust, she couldn't rejoice. Her brother Marty and twelve of his team members were still down there.

The name Alva Martin "Marty" Bennett was at the top of every list, alphabetically, as television stations across the country released the roster of missing miners.

Marty had labored underground for almost thirty years of his life, since the birth of his son, Russell Martin, who works for the same company that employed his father. Marty's father Alva had been a miner. His grandfather Howard had, too. Four generations of Bennetts had dodged disaster, but that streak of family luck ended the second day of the new year.

The Bennetts and the Perrys made their way to the Sago Baptist Church for the vigil. Donna thought sure her mother, Anna, would never withstand the strain. Despite her severe diabetes and a heart that's only about 20 percent functional, Anna kept the watch.

"It's not supposed to happen this way," Marty's mother repeated through the night. "Children are not supposed to die before their parents."

The fellowship hall of the church was packed with people, Donna remembers. It got so crowded she had to take oxygen. She sat alongside Marty's wife Judy, who has been on oxygen for the last three years, to help her lungs battle the distended air spaces of emphysema.

Outside it almost looked like daytime, the hillside and road illuminated by the lights from television stations and network crews who had converged on Sago from around the country. Most honored the solitude of the miners' friends and relatives who worried the night away inside the church. People all over Upshur County still talk about the courtesy and compassion shown by Anderson Cooper from CNN. Feelings, though, are still raw over Geraldo Rivera. Donna says he attempted to force his way into the church, and she's proud to say it was her son, Arnett Roger Perry II, who put his hand over the camera and chased the inconsiderate reporter out the door. In announcing funeral services, newspaper obituaries later read, "The family has requested that the media please respect their privacy."

As wrenching as the conflicting emotions were over Donna's rescued husband and missing brother, the ultimately inaccurate reports that the thirteen men were found alive left her so wrung out she couldn't even cry.

"It was a nightmare," Donna told me. "We had the miracle that they were alright, then I lost my brother. They let us believe for three hours those men were alive. Then they come in and said no survivors. It felt like they'd ripped the heart right out of you. But instead of grieving, we were mad."

Donna and Roger flip through a scrapbook of articles five inches thick. Slipped inside a plastic sleeve is the *Clarksburg Exponent Telegram* from January 4. The headline read, "12 Found Alive."

A four-by-six photograph drops out of the scrapbook. It hasn't been pasted in so Roger and Donna can pass it among guests in their home. Donna studies it often. It was the last picture taken of Marty. He sits, smiling, alongside his wife Judy at his parents' coal-heated house on Christmas day, 2005. He'd just had a big helping of sister Donna's macaroni salad, which he always insisted on, with Miracle Whip salad dressing, every time the family got together.

"Marty loved the kids," remembers Donna. "What he did, when we had these family gatherings, was play with the kids, give them rides on the four-wheeler."

Marty's young friends, his hunting and fishing buddies, the guys who worked for him at his backhoe and dozer business, his parents, his four sisters and one brother, his fellow coal miners, and cousins from all over the county started arriving at the Poling-St. Clair Funeral Home in Buckhannon

to pay their respects at 1:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 7, and they were still filing by his open casket at 8:00 that night.

"I've never seen so many people at a visitation," says Roger Perry. "All the funerals were like that. People were lined up down the streets

"Marty always had a smile. He was a real hard-working guy. He was one of the best miners I've ever worked with."

I asked Roger what makes a good coal miner.

"A good miner is one who'll help you do anything, who helps others do their job. He watches out for the other miners, keeps them from getting hurt."

For the time being, Roger's working at another mine up in Philippi, for the same company, wearing the same hat that was pelted with debris on that fateful morning at Sago. Four days a week, ten hours a day, for thirty years, that hat has protected him from mud, water, coal dust, dirt, and what miners call bad top, unstable material. He bought it at a flea market for $18, and it still passes safety requirements. If he ever were inclined to forget the day he lost twelve friends, all that horror comes back as he moved his hand around the back of the hat and feels the small crack created by the earthen shrapnel.

Like that unrepaired hat, the emotional scar on Upshur County will never completely heal, but the visible signs of grief are less noticeable now. The crosses hung with minors' hats have been taken down from the grounds of the courthouse in Buckhannon. Black ribbons are gone from doors of places like Audrey's on Highways 20 north of town, where miners gather after work for a trip around the salad bar and place of baked steak.

"Every marquee in this county said 'Pray for the Miners,'" recalls Archie Snyder. Prayer squares, shawls, and blankets poured into the Sago Baptist Church, from as far away as Poway, California, and they're still coming. Josephine and Ron Linger took me into the fellowship hall and showed me some of the treasures.

Margaret McDonald of South Mills, North Carolina, crocheted an eight-foot-long American flag with the words "We Will Never Forget, January 2, 2006, Sago Mine" right under the stars. A small statue of coal miner, comforted by the hand of Jesus, was left on the doorstep of the church. Kim Simmons sent copies of her book, *Lifted Up from the Deep*.

"I just found these books," said Josephine Linger. "I've only read a few pages, but it really touched me. I want to read the whole thing, because it's a beautiful book. She's telling the story of her son getting killed in a car accident, and she thought it may help us to understand."

The Lingers say their little church near the river and the railroad tracks was founded on love, and that's why they opened it up to the miners' families that night. Ninety-five percent of the church was constructed by members' own hands.

In the vestibule of Sago Baptist Church hangs a painting of a miner reading his Bible by helmet-light. "The lady who painted it had it in her house," says Ron Linger. "She said it just didn't seem to fit there, though, and then after this, the mine accident, she said she knew where it needed to be. And so she donated it to the church."

I ask Cheryl and Archie if they know of any roadside memorials to the miners, and we drive down Highway 20 south of Buckhannon to Denver Carpenter's place in Rock Cave. Out in the front yard, the retired General Motors mechanic had just mounted a sandstone slab against a Chevrolet motor stand. Sand-blasted into the rock, rich in iron ore, is the image of a cross, with a miner's lighted hat hung on top. "In Memory of the Sago Miners 2006," it reads. The artist had pulled the stone out of a rock quarry in Dover, Ohio, where Denver's brother lives. Denver says she wouldn't take a dime for the work.

What I don't find in the Perrys' scrapbooks that next morning is any sign of a note Marty might have written as he was dying in the depths of that coal mine. I knew other miners had written to their families during their last hours, and I ask Donna about that. She tells me her brother, who died at fifty-one, could not read or write.

I leave Roger and Donna at mid-day, as they prepare to watch a race that afternoon on television. With the quickening snow, I ask Roger about the wisdom of driving south, further into the mountains, toward the Swiss-German community of Helvetia. He cautions against it, but I proceed, nonetheless, led from the coal mines toward higher ground, into the covering whiteness. ❖

Fred Sauceman is the editor of *Now & Then*. A native of Greeneville, Tennessee, he has written about food and culture in the Mountain South.

"Celebrating Appalachian Institutions" (vol. 22, no. 2)

Mountain Miracles: The Crossnore School Story

Randy Sanders

Originally this was to be an essay about a weaving program started in the early 1920s, but then . . . life happened. As I drove toward Avery County, North Carolina, on that bright morning in August 2006, I had a pretty good idea of the story I was going to write. But if I could have been magically transported six hours into my future, I would have wondered where I had obtained the Appalachian Kool-Aid. For that fast-forwarded future would have shown me walking through undergrowth that towered over my six-foot frame, pushed on by a woman thirty years my senior and half my age in spirit.

How I ended up in the woods with that force-of-nature woman now makes perfect sense: I had been *Crossnored*. You will not find *Crossnored* in the dictionary, but it is, as the American novelist Willa Cather once said about art, "the elusive element that is life itself." To be *Crossnored* is to be connected; to sense humanity's pulse. Crossnore is a special place, and Crossnore School, Inc., is a special story.

In 1913 two medical doctors, Eustace and Mary T. Martin Sloop, settled in the mountain community of Crossnore, North Carolina. Actually, "settled" was hardly the word for the dynamic husband-and-wife team. With the passionate drive that underlies most creative acts, the Sloops, along with what would become a dedicated army of fellow travelers, willed Crossnore School, Inc., into being.

They did not set out to create a boarding school for children who, through no fault of their own, could no longer live at home. Nor did they arrive in Crossnore with the goal of building a hospital, dental clinic, weaving room, student cottages, or a dam. And yet, through a determined faith in the power of service, the good doctors built all of this and much more. In our time we speak of the purpose-driven life. Drs. Eustace and Mary Sloop did not need signposts to find their way into a purposeful life. Their abiding love for people, particularly children in need, and their affection for and commitment to one another took care of that.

First, though, a bit about weaving, the idea that led me to Crossnore. Before the Civil War, locally made looms and the resulting products of those looms were common to many mountain households, but with the post-war flow of factory-made goods, hand-weaving, even in more isolated areas, declined sharply. In the early 1920s Dr. Mary Sloop helped revive traditional weaving in the Crossnore community. Patterned after Fireside Industries at Berea College in Kentucky, her goal in establishing a weaving program was not so much to recapture a lost art for its own sake as it was to realize a confidence-boosting, income-producing outlet for local women. The culture of many mountain communities (and Crossnore was no exception) was that of girls who frequently married by age thirteen. In fact, in her autobiography, *Miracle in the Hills,* written with the Legette Blythe, Dr. Sloop recalls that "girls considered themselves old maids if they were not married by fifteen or sixteen."

Education was and is the "giant leap" out of a cycle of poverty, but Dr. Sloop instinctively understood that there were many support steps, like confidence-building and self-sufficiency, that made an educational environment possible. In the early years, the weaving program took place in a single room on the Crossnore campus (the school had officially incorporated in 1917). By 1929, with the financial help of five Charlotte Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) chapters, the weaving program was moved into a log structure affectionately referred to as the "weaving house."

A glimpse into the fortitude of Dr. Mary Martin Sloop can be gained from a photographic image that shows her, properly dressed, purse over mid-arm, standing in the Linville River. Around her, children are gathering river rocks. When I asked Laura Laughridge, Crossnore School's director of advancement and compliance, about this photograph, she said, "That is Dr. Sloop at her best." The photograph represents an important piece of the historical record of what to today called the Crossnore Weavers & Gallery: A Working Museum.

As Dr. Sloop recounts in her autobiography:

> Six years we used the weaving house. And then in the fall of 1935, while Aunt Newbie and I were attending a big DAR meeting in West Virginia, we got a telegram. Neither of us will ever forget that day. We had left in the weaving building thousands of dollars' worth of finished hand-woven goods, among them twenty-five beautiful coverlets. They telegram said, WEAVING BUILDING BURNED TO THE GROUND AND EVERYTHING IN IT.

A few weeks after the fire, in a letter to the president of Berea College, Dr. Sloop mentioned the rebuilding of the weaving house: "The children began the good work by giving part of their Saturday afternoon to getting rock out of the river. It was not what you might call warm, but they waded in bravely and carried out the rock—tons of them."

That letter was written in October. The new building was dedicated the following April. It is the same stone building that houses the newly remodeled and expanded Crossnore Weavers & Gallery: A Working Museum. To learn more about the museum, see the online gallery, and, like Mamie Eisenhower and Barbara Bush before you, become a Crossnore Weavers' customer, visit www.crossnoreschool.org/weavingroom.

Behind any institution there are layers of complexity. However, once capital campaigns, executive searches, and mission and vision statements are set aside, institutions are about people: the clients, volunteers, financial supporters, and staff who breathe their collective life force into that institution. Crossnore School is no different.

My day in Crossnore included interviews with Rachel Deal, a community resident and the niece of Dr. Eustace Sloop, and Michael J., a rising senior at the school. These face-to-face conversations were capped by a phone interview with Freda Nicholson, a former Crossnore student.

Rachel Deal

Rachel was that force-of-nature woman who led me through the woods. She was born and raised in the Crossnore community. While she did not attend the school for at-risk children, she certainly knew and socialized with many of them. As she lovingly phrased it, there was a "blending experience" of community school and Crossnore School children.

"In fact," she went on to recount, "one of the students became my first boyfriend. He was crippled, and he couldn't easily get around, so people had to drive him places. My dad took on that job, and I was glad he did."

Rachel left Crossnore in 1953 for a job in Charlotte where she worked for a textile manufacturing concern. While there, she also sang with the Charlotte Opera Company—a talent I would soon, quite unexpectedly, experience. During our conversation she said, "The next time you come back (she always assumes, if you've got a lick of sense about you, that you will be back), we'll have to show you the Presbyterian church and the rock dam." I asked if she had any time later that afternoon to show me around. She did.

Work on Crossnore Presbyterian Church began in the summer of 1924. Plans were prepared by a Greensboro architect at the direction of—as one might guess—Dr. Mary Martin Sloop. Rock used in the construction of the church was hauled from the Linville River, and the church was originally lighted with electricity generated at the power plant built by Dr. Eustace Sloop on that same river, half a mile below the church. (Although the Sloops were Presbyterians, Crossnore School has never been affiliated with any particular denomination.)

Rachel and I stood quietly in that beautiful stone, chestnut, and stained glass space, just soaking it in. She broke the silence by saying, "Mr. Sanders, if you don't mind, I would like to sing you a song," and with that, launched into "Blessed Assurance." Once again, I had been *Crossnored*.

Our trip to the rock dam was equally memorable. When was the last time you saw an octogenarian climbing over fallen pine trees? I think she would have simply kicked those trees out of the way had I not been there, but she didn't want to show off. Near the end of my time with her, she said, "When you come

to Crossnore campus and when you come to this town, you will always come back. Most everyone find it has a true feeling. You won't forget us." Truer words were never spoken.

Michael J.

Michael J., a rising senior at Crossnore School, was the featured student in the summer of 2006 issue of the *Crossnore Magazine*, a school publication. It is not a matter of confidentiality that keeps me from sharing the circumstances that brought Michael to Crossnore, because he speaks openly about those circumstances. Rather, I prefer to concentrate on his strong, and, to me, inspiring sense of self. But I will say this: The next time I think I am having a bad day, I will humble myself by thinking of Michael.

In the summer of 2006, through the Junior Statesmen of America program, Michael was selected from a national pool of applicants to spend a month at Princeton University where he studied speech communication and political philosophy. As he stated in *Crossnore Magazine*, "When people don't understand something, it blocks their point of view." Clearly, Michael puts a great deal of stock in articulating his views. And just as clearly, he is successful at it. In fact, out of all of the Princeton JSA students, he was handpicked to deliver an introductory speech to *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams.

"Each of us has a story to tell," he told me. "Everyone here has issues, and to those outside of Crossnore School, those issues brought on by our family circumstances may seem strange or foreign. But when you hear what others have gone through, you understand that we each have the power to create our own story." This, from a seventeen-year-old, who, I suspect, will create a meaningful story of his own.

Freda Nicholson

That same sense of self, a quality Crossnore School always strives to instill in its students, abounds in Ms. Nicholson. Hers was the phone interview I conducted after my visit to the campus. She spent two years at Crossnore School, in seventh grade and ninth grade. (Depending on family circumstances, it is not unusual for students to transition in and out of the school.) When asked about what Crossnore School meant to her, she said, "Crossnore showed me I could do something about my circumstances. I would move on, and make a life for myself." And so she did.

A registered nurse and mother of six, Freda was teaching part-time in the nursing program at a local university when the director of that program asked her to take a semester off to work on a human body exhibit for the soon-to-open Discovery Place in Charlotte. Discovery Place was an outgrowth of the Charlotte Nature Center where Freda volunteered, so the assignment seemed appropriate. What she was not prepared for, and what took a family meeting to decide, was an offer to become the CEO of Discovery Place. Six months before the 1981 opening, she accepted the job offer and served in that capacity until her retirement in 2001.

Crossnored

Like the proverbial pebble thrown into a pond, the Crossnore School story is one of ever-larger ripples: Freda Nicholson manifesting her love of science and respect for education into service at Discovery Place; the promise of Michael J. and his 273 schoolmates from twenty-six North Carolina counties and the ripples they will create; and that force-of-nature Rachel Deal, who serves on thirteen different committees in Avery County. Each of them shares a bond called Crossnore School.

And what about the story of Dr. Phyllis Crain, the current director of the school, and her life-affirming, recently-won battle with Stage IV cancer; or the newly-opened Miracle Grounds Coffee Shop and Bookstore; or the Crossnore connection to the notorious Jesse James through the McCanless gang; or the Western North Carolina Ben Long Fresco Trail of which Crossnore School's E. H. Sloop Chapel is a part? There are endless ways to be *Crossnored*, and I encourage you to find yours. As Rachel Deal might say, "You won't forget it." ❖

Randy Sanders is the managing editor of *Now & Then*.

"Digging Appalachia" (vol. 23, no. 1)

Growing Greasy Cut-Shorts

Bill Best

When I was a child growing up in the mountains of Haywood County, North Carolina, I lived on a small subsistence farm. We grew almost all our own food including corn for corn meal and wheat for flour. We grew hogs for butchering and raised milk cows for their milk. We never ate beef, preferring pork and poultry. The milk cows also provided butter for our own use and to sell. We sold milk until it became against the law to sell "Grade B" milk. Our usual flock of around a hundred laying hens provided for our family, with the remaining eggs being traded at a general store for coffee, sugar, spices, flavorings, and other necessary food items we didn't produce ourselves.

My father, uncles, and older cousins butchered the hogs for several families at one time when the weather turned cold enough during the fall. The meat was then preserved for use during the year. Most of it was cured, and one cured ham could bring as much as a whole hog prior to butchering. We kept the shoulders, and the side meats were cured for breakfast and for seasoning vegetables. My mother also canned some hams for us along with her canned sausage. The tenderloins were cooked fresh and were considered the best eating of all, especially when accompanied by redeye gravy and fresh biscuits.

We grew several gardens. There was cabbage, lettuce, both green and dried onions, turnips, okra, green peas and field peas, many varieties of tomatoes and beans, and white, open-pollinated field corn for eating fresh, for making fried corn, and for hominy. Much of the bean crop was dried into leather britches, also known as shuck beans, shucky beans, or, at one time, fodder beans. The peas were dried and shelled for storage. The field peas, beans, and tomatoes we grew are all defined as heirlooms now. And shuck beans, once a necessity prior to the advent of canning and refrigeration, are now considered delicacies, reserved for holidays and family reunions. Many beans were shelled out for seed, and those not needed for the following summer or for trading to family and neighbors were used for cooking as dried beans. They were served with cornbread, butter, and onions and, accompanied by milk, became supper on many occasions.

When my wife, Irmgard, and I moved to Kentucky to start working for Berea College in 1962, we bought a farm and began raising our own gardens. Instead of planting handed-down seeds, I started buying seeds from seed catalogs and plants for transporting from farm stores. But I was in for a rude awakening. I found that the vegetables our gardens produced didn't have the texture or flavors I had grown up with. When I reminisced about the gardens of my earlier years, I thought I was simply being romantic and that the tomatoes and beans I remembered were no different from the ones I was growing in Kentucky. I thought my taste buds were failing me.

My mother had always been a seed collector, and when we would visit my parents each fall, she would insist that I take back some of the bean seeds she had saved from her plantings that summer. Gradually I began to understand why I was having trouble with commercial seeds. I was planting seeds developed by bean breeding programs that wouldn't break during mechanical harvest. To their credit, the seed companies admonished us to "pick the beans while they were young and tender," but that meant picking them before the seed appeared. Otherwise they were too tough to eat. It was no wonder that some companies boasted that their beans were "grass-like."

Mother's beans never got tough, even after they had matured and turned yellow on the vine. They had the same tastes and textures I had remembered before

I had started growing commercial varieties. I quickly reverted back to growing her beans and realized that my taste buds were still intact. I also started doing a little research into the reasons our basic foods were "being messed with."

My interest in gardening continued, and thirty-six years ago, I started growing vegetables for the farmers' markets in Lexington, Kentucky, and in Berea, just three miles from our farm. Our two sons, David and Michael, and daughter, Barbara, became active gardeners. They soon excelled in marketing as well. And as soon as they were old enough to drive, they often went to the Berea market by themselves.

We grew and sold okra, sweet corn, peppers, eggplant, squash, potatoes, broccoli, hybrid and heirloom tomatoes, and heirloom beans. I quickly gave up growing any commercial beans at all since I feared the tough gene that had been introduced into commercial beans might migrate to my heirloom beans.

At first we had good success at selling tomatoes, both the more flavorful of the hybrid varieties and, increasingly, the heirloom varieties that were unfamiliar to most people at that time. In order to market the heirloom varieties, especially the pinks, blacks, yellows, striped, green-when-ripe, and other "unusual" colors, we had to give samples to customers. Gradually we won over a lot of people, and pink tomatoes are now our best sellers. Customers discovered that tomatoes high in acids and sugars were much more flavorful than the red tomatoes which are mostly high in acids. Red tomatoes are now far down in the list of customer preferences. Chefs at the best restaurants in Lexington have given our heirloom tomatoes a boost by putting our names on their menus. They come to the market to buy our heirloom tomatoes, usually arriving early to get the pick of our offerings and often taking up to forty percent of our load.

Many customers were at first skeptical of our heirloom beans since they looked so different from the new designer beans, with their designer genes, which had been developed for machine harvest and not for food. However, we soon noticed an interesting phenomenon: Customers were buying our beans to flavor the beans they were buying from other vendors or to flavor and add texture and protein to those they were growing at home. They discovered that when they mixed our beans with the "grass-like" commercial beans, they could get flavor and texture approaching those they had grown up with. Gradually they began buying only our beans, despite the fact that we were charging more for ours than other vendors were charging for the machine-harvested ones.

Our most popular beans are the traditional half-runners, cut-shorts, and greasy beans. Most seem to have originated with Indian tribes in this region. I recently attended a lecture by an archaeologist who had photos of 400-year-old bean seeds taken from Indian mounds. They were clearly cut-shorts, beans that are packed so tightly in the pod that he beans square off on the ends. Cut-shorts are especially high in protein because of the volume of beans compared to hull. Another favorite, greasy beans, don't have the fuzz of other beans and are slick in appearance, thus greasy looking. Both types can also share characteristics, and our collection now contains many varieties of greasy cut-shorts.

I started documenting the beans people were sending me. I bought another freezer, since the first one was running over, and started making sure I had saved enough seed beans to share or swap with others. Gradually the process became unmanageable, and I started talking with family and friends about becoming better organized in project that was coming to resemble a calling. I wrote two articles, one on heirloom beans and one on heirloom tomatoes, for a regional magazine, *Appalachian Heritage*. They were then reprinted in other publications, which led to more requests for information and seeds.

I then teamed with nine other people from three states to form a not-for-profit organization called the Sustainable Mountain Agriculture Center that could be an umbrella organization to host numerous agricultural and cultural activities including seed saving, woodlot utilization in a sustainable fashion, and experimentation with traditional Appalachian medicinal plants such as ginseng. Being not-for-profit also enables us to receive outside funding for hiring interns and conducting programs. Michael was the executive director for the first three years. Since my retirement from Berea College, I have assumed that mantle. Michael is now a professor of agricultural economics at Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville, Tennessee.

Many local and regional groups have been given guided tours of our summer operations, and the center has hosted visitors from Maine to California and from the state of Washington to Florida. Our web site has attracted seed buyers from almost all states and several countries. Some visitors have brought heirloom seeds with them, and a husband and wife from

Georgia recently brought both seeds and a seed sheller they use in their operation. I have purchased one, and it works like a charm, speeding my shelling duties ten-fold.

Our current collection of Appalachian heirloom bean varieties now exceeds 300, while we have over fifty Appalachian heirloom tomato varieties. We now own four freezers.

I believe we are helping people of all ages get reacquainted with a part of their food heritage which should not be lost. We are maintaining an important part of the genetic diversity of some of our major food crops. And our many customers think we have reintroduced to the general public some important good that are both tasty and nutritious. Most of our interns have realized that bigger is not always better when it comes to agricultural matters, and some have even chosen to join us by developing their own operations. One is now a full-time grower of heirloom vegetables. We salute them. ❖

Bill Best retired from Berea College in 2002 after a forty-year career as an administrator, professor, and coach. He now directs the Sustainable Mountain Agriculture Center near Berea which makes Appalachian heirloom seeds available to all fifty states and many foreign countries.

"Wildness"
(vol. 23, no. 2)

Goose

Katie Fallon

He keeps your picture taped to the dashboard, next to the glove box. The photo's edges curl up around you posing in a pink bikini. Inside the glove box, a butterfly knife rests under the insurance card. You know it's there, and it's thrilling. This night, brown leaves dance on the streets like marionettes, the puppeteers hidden up in the trees. The music's so loud in the car that no one can talk. You light a Marlboro and your boyfriend hands you a warm can of Coors Light. He's already got one open between his legs. Two boys in the back seat pass a pipe.

It is the night of the homecoming dance, sophomore year of high school. You've lied to your parents and you never go to the dance, though they bought you a dress. Instead, your boyfriend, whom you aren't allowed to date, picks you up at your friend's house. You, your boyfriend, and two of his pals go driving around in his beat-up Ford Tempo. You call the car "a beat-up Ford Tempo" now, remembering it more than a decade later, but then it was sexy—five-speed standard transmission, Grateful Dead stickers, the inside warm with the smell of wintergreen Skoal and Cool Water cologne.

You leave the suburbs, go out past the cow pastures, down the back roads and dirt road and through Bear Hollow to more suburbs, housing developments, gated communities, folks who want to live in the country without really being in the country. Your boyfriend rolls down his window and whips his Coors can at a yellow deer-crossing sign. The metallic crack echoes and everyone laughs. He reaches under his seat and opens another, smiles at you, holds your hand while he downshifts.

You smile back and think about everything, of what your friends are doing, of who's at the dance. Of your boyfriend, and how lucky you are. Of the way you get to ride in the passenger seat. Your boyfriend is not very tall, but he's a wrestler, and you like the way his veins move under his skin on top of his muscles. He has big blue eyes (brown? you can't quite remember) and sandy hair that flops across his forehead. Your friends think he's a bad influence. He thinks they're snobs. Your parents hate him. Then, you pretended not to know why. You fought them, you cried, you broke things and ran away. Now, looking back, you see exactly why and realize you knew it then, and liked it. Which might have been the reason you're riding here, in the Tempo, drinking Coors Light and smoking reds and thinking about danger and thrills and your boyfriend's tongue and teeth and hickeys and when would they pass that pipe up here?

So your boyfriend drives and music blares and you look out the window at trees and trees and the black velour night. Moon shadows rise and fall and hover in ditches. It's almost Halloween.

One of the guys in the back shouts and leans forward, slaps your boyfriend's shoulder. The car stops, he throws open the back door, jumps out, and this is when it happens—the event that sticks in your mind now, looking back, years and years later.

A mailbox. A beautiful mailbox, handmade, in the shape of a Canada goose. Wooden, painted, careful detail in the goose's markings, delicate brush strokes around the black eyes. Neatly stenciled letters march across its folded wings. What a lovely mailbox, you think, and smile. Then your boyfriend's pal grabs the goose by the neck. He yanks hard. The mailbox shakes,

but stays attached to its stand. He yanks again. And again. He puts his arms around the goose's resistant body and wrests it back and forth. Sweat runs down his cheeks and he curses. He jerks the goose again and it finally breaks free of its stand, breaks free but falls forward and connects with his forehead. He cries out, blood bursts, but he holds onto the mailbox, staggers a few steps and sets it in the middle of the road, in front of the car. Then he kicks it, caving in one side of the goose, keeps kicking, circles it, looks for weaknesses. He spits on it, stalks back to the car, smears the blood across his face with his palm.

Fuckin thing is heavy, he says, gets in and slams the car door. Your boyfriend giggles, his other pal claps, and you stare uneasily at the goose, disappearing in the rearview mirror as the car drives away. Your boyfriend tosses his Coors can into a rose bush, picks up your hand again. You look really good tonight, he tells you. You smile, maybe even blush, and sink lower into the seat, hard beer can squeezed tightly between your thighs.

You remember all this today, more than a decade later. You remember it in second-person point of view, probably because you feel like you're watching the events happen to someone else.

You remember that night because a few minutes ago, your mother called and told you that her mailbox had been stolen. Why would anyone steal my mailbox? she asked you. Someone must not like me. You hung up the phone and thought about everything, of your husband at work, your dog, your birdfeeders. How blue the male indigo bunting's feathers looked in the sun, the patchy red of an immature cardinal, how you need to clean pine needles out of the gutters. You thought about your ex-boyfriend's son, how he must be about eight years old, and his son's mother, smoking menthols behind the counter at Mister Donut, her permed blonde hair reeking of curdled cream. It made you uncomfortable, thinking about everything like that. It made you a little sad, too, not because you miss your ex-boyfriend or envy his son's mother, but you wonder what happened to people you knew, and what they're doing right now, today, back home.

But mostly, after hanging up the phone, you thought of that goose, the unprovoked aggression, the blood, your complacency. The reasons behind it all made you worry, mostly because you couldn't figure them out, and maybe you blamed yourself.

You are also bothered by a scenario you imagined for the first time that night: An aging woman, your mother perhaps, pads our to her front porch to get the newspaper, white breath puffs hanging in front of her mouth, chill morning air goose-bumping her skin. She looks down to the end of her driveway, terry bathrobe floating around her body. She squints, but it's not there—her mailbox is gone, the beautiful handmade Canada goose mailbox her son or daughter painstakingly fashioned and painted in wood shop class. She gasps, then looks further down the road, and sees it shattered, beaten, kicked-in and collapsed in a pile. She might shriek or cry or call the police, but in your imagined scenario, she gently collects the pieces, cradles the goose's broken body, and seeing it's beyond repair, quietly slides it into a garbage can. She goes inside and calls her daughter and sighs, someone must not like me. ❖

Katie Fallon is the author of *Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird* (Ruka Press, 2011), which was named a finalist for the Reed Award for Outstanding Writing on the Southern Environment in 2012. She has taught writing at Virginia Tech and West Virginia University and is co-founder of the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia.

"Fabric of Appalachia"
(vol. 24, no. 2)

Searching for Sut:

Solving the Mystery of George Washington Harris's Gravesite

M. Thomas Inge

Although the names of George Washington Harris, and his irrepressible creation Sut Lovingood, are not exactly household words, both by now have been accorded a secure place in American and Southern letters. Neither a writer by trade, nor a Southerner by birth, Harris contributed to our literature one of its most distinctively Southern comic figures in Sut and brought the American literary vernacular to its highest level of achievement before Mark Twain.

Born in 1815 in Alleghany City, Pennsylvania, Harris was taken as a child by his half-brother to Knoxville, Tennessee, where he grew up an enthusiastic Southerner in all political and cultural senses of the word. With little formal education, but well-read in English literature, Harris followed a wide cross-section of occupations, including metal working, serving as captain of a steamboat, farming, running a glass works and a sawmill, surveying, running for political office, serving as a postmaster, and working for the railroad—jobs which would provide him with rich life experiences from which to draw when he began to write.

Harris's first publications were political essays and sporting epistles for local newspapers and for the nationally prominent *New York Spirit of the Times*, where he demonstrated a facility for dialect and bringing backwoods scenes and events to life on the printed page. When he contributed his first Sut Lovingood story to the *Spirit of the Times* on November 4, 1854, he outdistanced all the other humorists of the Old South by allowing one central character to tell his own stories in his own crude language and by granting that character full independence in thought and action.

What makes Sut distinctive, among other things, is the consistent combination in his character of such human failings as bigotry, vulgarity, cowardice, and brutality, alongside a steadfast opposition to hypocrisy, dishonesty, taking advantage of the innocent, and limits on personal freedom. Sut's wildly funny pranks and incorrigible nature lead to a rough justice of sort, with hypocrites exposed and dishonesty punished. Mark Twain, who reviewed Harris's one book in 1867, *Sut Lovingood: Yarns*, would learn his lessons well from Sut and put them to effective use later in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Whether or not Huck would have existed at all without the literary example of Sut is an interesting question.

Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun by a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool proved to be very popular in its own time and would remain in print, from the same plates as the first edition, into the early decades of the twentieth century. Its longevity was partly sustained by its shady reputation as a bawdy book not for the timid or weak-hearted. Booksellers sold it surreptitiously and in a plain brown wrapper.

Two mysteries about Harris have been longstanding and seemingly irresolvable. He had collected a second set of his stories in a manuscript to be called *High Times and Hard Times* and traveled in December of 1869 from Decatur, Alabama, to Richmond and Lynchburg, Virginia, to arrange for its publication. Afterward, on

a train bound for Knoxville, Harris fell ill and, when he arrived in an unconscious state, was carried to the Atkins House in that city. Just before he died, he whispered the word, "poisoned."

As the obituary in the *Knoxville Daily Press and Herald* put it on December 14, 1869, did Harris die "by the stroke of God, or the poisoned chalice of a wicked man"? That mystery may be beyond solving, but not so the second—that is the location of his gravesite. According to the same obituary, Harris's second wife of less than two months, and now sudden widow, traveled to Knoxville and accompanied the body to Chattanooga. There the trail ends, since Harris's body can be found in no cemetery in Chattanooga. Scholars have sought to find the gravesite elsewhere to no avail. Once a George Washington Harris was found to be buried in City Cemetery in Nashville, but he turned out to be the wrong one.

And independent scholar from Atlanta, John S. Bayne, has for years been tracking down the graves of prominent people, photographing the sites, and reporting the results of his research at annual meetings of the Popular Culture and American Culture associations. In 2006 Bayne decided to focus on Southern writers with the aim of producing a book on the subject. The photographs he has collected have been very revealing for what they tell us about our attitudes toward our writers and the extent to which we choose to remember, or forget, them.

In seeking Harris's grave, Bayne came up against the usual dead ends but chose to persist by contacting all the history centers, state and local archives, and public libraries in Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville. Since Harris was residing in Decatur, Alabama, at the time of his death, Bayne wrote to the curator of the Morgan Country Alabama Archives, who in turn put him in contact with Decatur historian and genealogist Phil Wirey and Randy Cross, a professor of English at Calhoun Community College in Decatur, specialist in Southern literature, and editor of several books by Tennessee novelist T. S. Stribling. When other colleagues learned of the search for Harris, Bayne, Wirey, and Cross were soon joined by Shelia Byrd and Jill Chadwick of Calhoun Community College to form an unofficial search of committee to find the lost writer. In addition, as officers of Sigma Kappa Delta, the national English honor society, Byrd and Chadwick persuaded the organization's board to underwrite the construction of a proper monument, should Harris be found.

It was genealogist Wirey who eventually discovered the key. Knowing that it was not an uncommon practice in the nineteenth century for remarried husbands to be buried with their first wives, he sought out the grave of Mary Emiline Nance Harris, who died in 1867 in Trenton, Georgia, and left behind five children. Wirey theorized that the second very recent wife brought the body to Trenton to burial at the request of the children who lived there. Probably the family could not afford a headstone during difficult Reconstruction times, so the practice in such cases was to substitute a small triangular fieldstone marker against something better in the future. When a delegation visited Mary's gravesite in the Brock Cemetery, all of this proved to be accurate and true. Next to her grave was a burial depression and a marker exactly of the kind described. Sut had been found—or at least they are ninety percent sure that Harris is the person resting there.

A DEDICATION PRAYER AND A SCRIPTURE FROM THE BIBLE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF LAUGHTER WAS READ BY KEVIN FOWLER, A GREAT, GREAT-GRANDSON OF GEORGE WASHINGTON HARRIS.

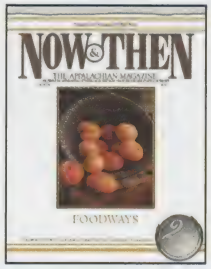
Such is the conclusion of the search committee and the Trenton community, who gathered at the site on the sunny Sunday afternoon of April 20, 2008, to unveil the five-foot obelisk erected by Sigma Kappa Delta just in front of the unmarked fieldstone. About 150 attended the ceremony and were welcomed by Trenton Mayor Anthony Emanuel. Speakers included all the members of the search committee, as well as the present writer, who was asked to make some comments on behalf of Harris's contributions to American literature. A dedication prayer and a scripture from the Bible about the importance of laughter were read by Kevin Fowler, a great, great-grandson of George Washington Harris. He had come

from New Mexico with his father, Bill Fowler, a great-grandson, and his son will Fowler, a great, great, great-grandson, to participate in the ceremony—three generations of Harris descendants.

When I was asked to suggest an appropriate epitaph for the monument, someone had already suggested a line from "Amazing Grace," "I once was lost but now am found," which would have suited Harris's sense of humor. Then I remembered a line from a story about the death of Sut Lovingood which has survived only in a fragment. Parson Bullen pronounces the brief funeral oration over Sut's body: "We air met, my brethering, to bury this ornery cuss. He had hosses, an' he run 'em; he had chickens, an' he fit 'em; he had kiards, an' he played 'em. Let us try an' recollect his virtues—ef he had any—an' forgit his vices—ef we can. For of sich air the kingdom of heaven!" The obelisk bears on one side those last two sentences in full dialect.

What would Harris or Sut have to say about all this? Sut might repeat a line from "Parson John Bullen's Lizards," one of his best known yarns: "Some durn'd fool professor dun this, who hed more zeal than sence." It is to be hoped, however, that the redoubtable search committee, flushed with its success, will now turn to the third and final mystery about George Washington Harris. Whatever happened to that manuscript of *High Times and Hard Times* that Harris had with him on that fateful trip? It has never been found. ❖

M. Thomas Inge is the Robert Emory Blackwell Professor of Humanities at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia. Recent publications include *William Faulkner: Overlook Illustrated Lives* and *The Incredible Mr. Poe: Comic Book Adaptations of the Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, and the editorship of the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 9: Literature*.



"Foodways"
(vol. 25, no. 1)

The Stoney Creek Primitive Baptist Associational Meeting and Dinner on the Ground

Martha Whaley

"I could never hold my water," said Aunt Lula as she perched on the wooden seat. I was wide eyed. What water? Why was she holding it? Where was she holding it? "Do ye need to go?" she asked. I shook my head wordlessly and watched as Aunt Lula adjusted her clothing. She wore a navy blue shirtwaist dress with functional flat buttons in a single line all the way from her throat to the mid-calf hem. I noticed she did not wear a girdle to hold up her hose as my mother did. Instead, the opaque, fleshy stockings were rolled and twisted into a knot just below her knee. Her shoes were black lace-ups with a medium square heel—a style preferred by most of the middle-aged and elderly women who attended Aunt Lula's church. My mother called these shows "Old Lady Comforts," and she "wouldn't be caught dead in them."

Aunt Lula led me out of the dim outhouse and down a stone path to the front yard of the church. Children ran, shouted, and threw pebbles in the creek. Women and girls retrieved covered dishes from an assortment of well-used but clean and polished Fords, Chevys, and an occasional Buick. Men and big boys carried the slatted benches that served as church pews out the church door and down the steps. Some benches were already situated in the shade, and a few stood under the sparsely scattered trees. It was mid-day in mid-August, so every scrap of shade would be used.

Aunt Lula and I walked across the creek on a narrow bridge barely wide enough for one car. We climbed several steps to a long front porch. This was the home of a friendly neighbor who offered the use of her refrigerator to congregants of the Stoney Creek Primitive Baptist Associational Meeting and Dinner on the Ground. Without knocking, Aunt Lula entered the house and reclaimed the food she had prepared.

As we walked back across the bridge, I observed two long rows of benches with seats facing and touching each other. Women were placing food on them. It looked and smelled wonderful, but as a six-year-old, I was not quite tall enough to lean over the backs of the benches to reach it. Maybe some of that crispy, golden fried chicken would be piled high on the platter so I could snare a top piece.

Aunt Lula placed her fried pork tenderloin, gravy, and a large plate of cathead biscuits on a bench. Then she turned to me and said, "Now, honey, jist come right over here and be real quiet while the preacher turns thanks." I considered her words throughout the long list of recounted blessings and requests for blessings. "Turn thanks." What could it mean?

The prayer was over, the pastor and his wife were summoned to the front, and the line divided smoothly on each side of the double row of benches. Aunt Lula and I stepped to the back of the line and moved along inch-by-inch, step-by-step. I pictured myself stretching over the back of a bench, digging into some lovely buttered mashed potatoes and tumbling head first into a big bowl of something yucky, like stewed turnips, while a pyramid of corn on the cob went rolling off the benches and onto the grass.

As the line crept even more slowly, I became convinced nothing would remain except one deviled

egg. I decided Aunt Lula could just have it. I didn't like deviled eggs unless they were made with my mother's fourteen-day sweet pickles.

When we finally reached the food, Aunt Lula handed a limp-looking paper plate to me. "Now, honey, you jist hold onto this here plate and tell me what you want and I'll git it fer ye." Things were looking up. But now I had another problem. My mother had said, "You must be very quiet. Just whisper to Aunt Lula if you need anything."

I pointed to a plate of country ham swimming in redeye gravy. A large piece went on my plate, which I was holding with both hands. "What else?" Now I couldn't point. I tried to indicate my desire for some creamed corn. "Soup beans?" asked Aunt Lula. I shook my head vigorously from side-to-side. "Corn?" I nodded. In this manner we made our way past platters of roast beef, bowls of fried Golden Delicious apples, plates of sliced homegrown tomatoes, and a variety of fresh green beans well-seasoned with ham and fatback.

We sat on a bench and I managed to balance the plate well enough to eat most of the contents. Aunt Lula left me for just a moment and brought back a piece of chocolate cake and a bowl of banana pudding. I reached for both. She smiled, handed them to me, and went back for another dessert for herself.

After Aunt Lula had delivered me safely home later that day, I watched my mother peel potatoes for supper. "How did you like Aunt Lula's church?" she asked.

"I had to sit on my feet."

"Why on earth was that?"

"The people were all washing each other's feet, and I didn't want them to wash mine."

"Oh honey, they wouldn't have washed your feet. Only adults who are members of the church wash each other's feet."

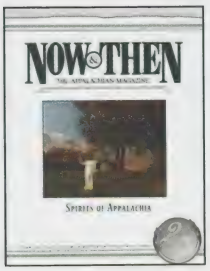
"Why do they do that?"

"It's called a church ordinance. They do it to follow the example of Jesus, who washed the disciples' feet."

"Mama, what does it mean to turn thanks? And where is Aunt Lula holding her water? And . . . "

"Hold on, hold on. One question at a time, please." Dinner on the ground had been more than just a meal. ❖

Martha Whaley is the Technical Services Coordinator and History of Medicine Librarian at East Tennessee State University's Quillen College of Medicine Library. She also manages the Museum at Mountain Home.



"Spirits of Appalachia" (vol. 25, no. 2)

The Spirit of Humanity in Appalachia

Roberta Herrin
Director, Center for Appalachian Studies and Services

My family homeplace sits at the end of a dead-end road, in a bowl hollowed out of the mountains by some ancient force of nature. Visitors comment that they sense a presence on these acres. A few years ago, I invited colleagues for a workshop-retreat at the farm. An hour into the work session, Pauline quietly left the table to wander through the pasture and down the road. She said she had been "called away" from our mundane business to experience something larger, which she felt the minute she crossed the bridge and came into view of the house and field. One family friend senses spirits on the property—eyes that look out from the laurels along the creek bank. They watch and protect, she says.

Last year I met a man who has the "gift of sight." Like Sharyn McCrumb's character Nora Bonesteel, he "knows things." So I asked him, "What is it that people sense? What is this presence that called Pauline away from the work of the day? What are the spirits or watchers?" He said that people are picking up on the ancient energy of the mountains mixed with the accumulated spirit of all who have lived on the land. Energy and spirit emanate from eons of vegetative growth and rocks and water and pioneers and farmers and Native Americans—especially Native Americans, he said.

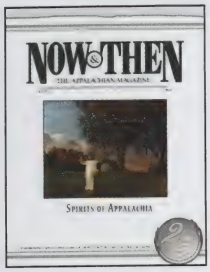
Perhaps this phenomenon—energy of the mountains mixed with centuries of human spirit—explains the universal attraction of mountains—not just the Appalachian mountains. Greg Mortenson captured it in *Three Cups of Tea.* Horace Kephart found it and documented it in *Our Southern Highlanders.*

It is tempting to think of mountain-energy-spirit as something extraordinary and otherworldly. The very word "spirit" connotes transcendence of the here-and-now. Phrases such as "pioneering spirit," "spirit of discovery," and "spirit of independence" describe the quality in human beings that lifts them beyond the ordinary. Even the word "moonshine" conveys a sense of lunar mystery. I would argue, however, that in Appalachia these are quite ordinary aspects of the culture, ordinary in the sense that they are hallmarks.

Over the past twenty-five years, *Now & Then* magazine has featured hundreds of essays and stories and poems about culture. But it is, ironically, the English poet and critic Matthew Arnold whose definition sits most comfortably with me. In the 1873 Preface to *Literature and Dogma,* he writes that culture is "the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and this with the history of the human spirit."

When visitors to my homeplace sense watchers or spirts or presences, they are witnessing culture, the accumulated spirit and energy of the past, the highest remnants of humanity. It is not otherworldly. It is immediate and sensible to us, if we can be still and quiet in its presence. The Appalachian spirit is as old as the mountain and is reborn in every human being who is willing to become acquainted with it. ❖

Roberta Herrin is the director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services.



"Spirits of Appalachia" (vol. 25, no. 2)

Still Like I Left It

Michael Joslin

"Now, I loved making whiskey. I'd rather make whiskey than eat when I'm hungry. But if I had it to do over again, I'd never know what whiskey tasted like," says sixty-five-year-old Ralph, born and raised on a spur of the Blue Ridge in Western North Carolina.

It's been twenty-one years since he last spent the night tending his copper still beside the gurgling branch, twenty-one years without a drink of the corn whiskey he used to make. That many years ago he simply walked away from a tradition that goes back generations in his family.

Family is what began his whiskey making, and family is what stopped him from firing up the still. His father initiated him in the craft when Ralph was twelve years old. After thirty-two years, Ralph stopped making and drinking whiskey when his six-year-old daughter, Dawn, developed cancer.

"When she got sick I promised the Lord that as long as she lived, I wouldn't drink no more. That's when I stopped. When she died, I never went back," he says, his blue eyes blinking behind his glasses.

Returning to the still site is a journey back in time for Ralph. The branch where his last still stands also fed an earlier one that he and his father ran for eighteen years together. Starting off on an old logging road, Ralph heads into a hardwood forest as he climbs the ridge. The road turns into a rutted path, then into a barely discernable track. Finally it disappears altogether, and Ralph feels his way through the wood, the contours of the land leading him. Changes over twenty years make him a bit unsure.

"We never did have no trail to it. We came all the time different ways, so no one could find the still," he says, squeezing through a laurel bush.

As he descends a narrow cove, he questions his memory, and when the branch at the bottom becomes deeper and the vegetation thicker, he decides he needs to cross over to the next cove. Thick stands of laurel and ivy slow him down as he walks back to the top of the ridge to start over again. This time he sidles down the right side of the ridge. As a slow falling mist turns to rain, he hears the murmur of the branch and knows he's in the right place this time.

He is as much at home in these woods as in his house. They have become his ancestral estate.

"Both of my grandpas used to make whiskey. My mother's father only had one arm and a big family to raise. He made whiskey to sell. Weren't anything else he could do. Whiskey-making was bred in me," he says, crouching under a low laurel bush as he leads the way to the first still site.

"My grandpa wasn't exactly a preacher, but he preached. He said whiskey was made to sell, not to drink. He kept it in an oil can. One day somebody came to buy some; he sent his kids down to pick up the liquor. They walked down the road, then turned in to the still to get it," says Ralph, a smile creasing his face. "They was walking back with the whiskey in the oil can when the sheriff stopped and asked if they wanted a ride. They looked at each other, then got in, and he dropped them right at the house.

"Whiskey-making come down on both sides of the family," he reiterates, standing beside the branch where his father taught him the craft.

And old wooden barrel sits deeply sunken in the ground, its metal band holding the pitted oak slats in place. Three feet away the furnace gapes open, rocks still firmly in place, and pit ready to be loaded with dried locust and chestnut sticks. Beside the furnace the

branch slips through the tangled roots of a large oak tree. Lower down in the clear water lies the top of an old aluminum coffee pot.

"I'd make coffee. Yep, I spend many a night right here. There was the first one where I worked with my pap. My old barrel has about rotted out. See—that would make it work better, to be buried like this," he says, pointing under a drooping rhododendron branch, it leaves handing over the barrel.

Looking around, he discovers a glass gallon jug with a piece broken out of it. He looks at the jug and points to a flat spot above the barrel.

"I'd lay my jugs out right there under the rhododendron."

He sets the jug by the barrel, then tells how a bear once got into the full barrel, making a mess of things. Ralph decided to solve the problem.

"I put a piece of meat in the barrel and rigged a shotgun. I ran a string from the meat to the trigger and set the gun right here, pointing through this hole."

That night, he became worried that someone might stumble onto the gun and get hurt, so the next morning he hurried down to the still. He found the gun had been set off.

"That bear never did come back again," he says, then laughs.

He abandoned this spot because someone stumbled upon it and poured baking soda into his still. When he next fired it, foam came pouring out, and he lost the whole run.

He moved down the branch to a neighbor's abandoned site from years gone by and set up the still that he worked until he gave up on whiskey.

Fighting his way down through the heavy laurel thickets to the site is difficult. His boots slip on the wet bank and sink into the soggy soil by the creek. A man would need a purpose to bring him through this maze of vegetation, steep banks, and moss-covered rocks. After several rough minutes, he sees the plastic pipe in the branch, then steps into the small clearing where the still sits.

"Well, about like I left it, ain't it," he says in wonder.

Walking behind his copper still, he runs his hand lovingly over the tarnished metal. He looks around to see his barrel buried in the ground, two washtubs—one for cooking the mash, the other for cooling his worm—a shovel, a hoe, and his bow saw leaning on the furnace where he left the handy tool those many years ago. The only thing missing is the worm, the coiled copper pipe where steam changed into whiskey. He carried that crucial piece of equipment home with him when he left the still for the last time.

"A whiskey-making person always carried the worm home when he finished a run; that way no one could come use his still," he says. "Now I kept this thing shiny, like a new penny. I called her 'Ole Betsy.'

"B_ [he begins to say a name but thinks better of it]—a man made this copper still. I bought the sheets of copper, and he made it for me. You've got to use brass rods to do your welding with, or it'll be poison," he says, picking up the thump keg and placing it on a rock where it stood in the past. If he had brought his worm, he'd be back in business.

Carrying the worm, carrying 50-pound sacks of sugar and meal and lugging out several gallon jugs of whiskey in a sack, the glass carefully wrapped in cloth to prevent noise and breakage, kept the whiskey maker in good physical condition.

"There's a lot of work in making whiskey. A lazy man cannot make liquor; it's too much work in it."

As wind stirs the trees, he looks up into the forest's crown where raindrops drip from summer's green leaves. The laurel thicket shelters the still in dusky gloom this morning.

"When you make your best whiskey is when the poplar leaves gets about the size of squirrel ears. And be sure to bury your barrels about half way."

Over the years Ralph made many runs of whiskey here but never sold the pure spirits. His non-commercial approach kept him out of jail. But he freely shared the liquor with his friends and drank it himself.

"Good white whiskey—you get drunk the night before and wake up the next day feeling fine. You can go on in to work. I used honey one time instead of sugar, but with that, you'd get up the next morning and take a dipper of water, then you'd be just as drunk as you was the night before. I couldn't take that."

He had read once that the kings of England made their liquor that way and he wanted to try it.

In a reversal of the Rip Van Winkle story, an older Ralph has returned to find the place sleeping peacefully, pretty much as he left it, although the copper has dimmed and the barrels have slowly rotted. He bustles around, hooking up the thump keg, setting the plastic pipe in the branch to get water running.

"I get excited just thinking about it," he says as he kneels down by the furnace. "You got to have a splitter—a piece of tin. You

put it agin the still, bend it in a 'v'; it splits the fire. If you don't have a splitter, all the heat hits on the front. You need to spread it around."

He reaches over to set up a washtub. It's clear he'd love to practice his craft one more time.

"I'd take my meal—twenty-five pounds of meal—put it in this two-bushel tub with it half full of water and build a fire under it until it's boiling, really flopping. Then cool if off with water until it was a little over lukewarm, and then put it in the oak barrel. Then you put in your sugar, then malt on top to smother it down.

"Now, some people put in yeast, but that will give you a headache. You let fermenting take place on its own; that's why the barrel is buried. Let it ferment seven days. One way to tell it's ready is you'll see big clear spots the size of silver dollars on top."

He rubs his hands together, then continues: "You dip the mash into the still, and you're ready for a run. Start the fire, get it boiling. Don't cap it until it's boiling good."

Ralph demonstrates how he set the cap on the still and sealed it with paste made from meal and water. He also sealed the connections to the thump keg.

"You feel the pipe until it's warm," he says, placing his fingers on the tube connecting the still to the thump keg. "Put your backings in the thump keg. When it starts thumping, you got your worm in here. (He indicates the second wash tub where he has placed the plastic pipe with water running from the branch.) Next thing you know, whiskey will start coming out the worm. I'd always catch it in glass jugs. Look to see when the beads will go straight to the bottom—before that they'll look like bullfrog eyes on top of the liquor. When the beads go down, move the jug away and cap it. I'd get six gallons out of one barrel.

"I tried to keep mine around 120 to 130 proof. A lot of folks watered thiers down, but I wouldn't."

Even though Ralph retired long ago, his fame remains in his community.

"There've been several wanted me to show them how to make whiskey, but I wouldn't. There's two things I think I saw the end of on Jonas Ridge. I was the last one to plow my garden with horses, and I was the last one to make whiskey."

The old still looks light blue after more than twenty years of neglect, but Ralph think he could clean it up with some Brasso and a good scrubbing. The temptation is there, more from a desire to practice his craft than to quench a twenty-year thirst. But Ralph knows Dawn is in heaven, waiting for him. He plans to join her there. ❖

Michael Joslin has published six books on Appalachia: *Mountain People, Places and Ways; More Mountain People, Places, and Ways; Appalachian Bounty; Our Living Heritage; Highland Handcrafters;* and *Mountain Spring*. He has published over a thousand articles with his essays and photographs in newspapers and magazines and has exhibited his photographs numerous times.

"Appalachian High"
(vol. 26, no. 1)

Up on the Billy

Elizabeth Hunter

The stories well up and flow from Carlean like water from a mountain spring. We are sitting in the living room in a house her husband Gerold built almost entirely by himself, without any written-down plans. The house is tucked into a steeply sloping hillside, above the little branch that chiseled the furrow between the mountain we call the Billy and a rhododendron-smothered ridge.

Nailed to the living room's exposed beams are a few of the dozens of antique tools Gerold collected. There are more down in his shop: old axes with new handles he made, draw knives, anvils, hammers. There are power tools too: a lathe, sanders, saws. Lumber from trees he cut up on the Billy and ripped into boards in the sawmill below his son Steve's house is sorted by kind—oak, walnut, cherry—and stacked. Gerold had plans for it all. He planned to build houses for his three grandchildren. He planned to build the coffins he and Carlean would be buried in when their time came. It never occurred to him or anyone else that his time would come so soon.

Gerold died on March 24, 2009, five weeks before his sixty-eighth birthday, eight weeks before his and Carlean's forty-ninth wedding anniversary, just as forsythia and daffodils were filling the dooryards in the Bandana community with golden light. Five months earlier, he and Carlean had been up on the Billy when Gerold felt sick. He was carrying lengths of PVC pipe to repair the line from the spring to the reservoir; Carlean thought the pipe bouncing on his shoulder might have made him queasy. But it wasn't the pipe, or his diabetes—they came down to the house to check his sugar—or the small stroke she suspected he might have had earlier, when he told her that, for a few days, he'd had spells where he couldn't feel his arm or leg, or find his words.

What it was, the doctors discovered, was a walnut-sized tumor—inoperable, terminal—behind one ear. "The doctor said 'terminal,' but I don't think it registered with Gerold," Carlean says. They made the hour-each-way every day journey to Asheville for weeks, for punishing chemo and radiation treatments that sapped his strength. The trips bought a couple of months, not enough time to do any of the things he'd planned—most urgently, to build his coffin. He took Carlean down to the shop and tried to tell her how to do it. "I finally had to say, 'Gerold, I can sew clothes, but I cannot do this. I wish I could, but I cannot.'"

She did everything else he asked of her, to care for him at home until he died, then to wash and shave and dress him. He wanted no funeral home, no embalming. He wanted to be laid to rest in the old way. He was a preacher, and he'd seen families spend way more than they could afford, to give their loved ones the best putting away money could buy. "He thought that was wrong," Carlean says. "He was very specific about what he wanted. He took my hands, pressed them, and said, 'We can do this, Carlean.'"

Gerold Grindstaff first laid eyes on Carlean Ensor in third grade. For Gerold, it must have been love at first sight. "He wrote me love notes, but I was too bashful to read them and threw them away," she says. At the end of the school year, Carlean's family moved to Pennsylvania and didn't return for seven years. Shortly afterward, Gerold appeared in their yard. "When he showed up," she remembers, "I'd just washed my hair."

They married in May of the year Carlean graduated from high school. They lived a year with his parents, then for twelve years in a house Gerold fixed up for them, a house once occupied by his grandparents. During their last years there, Gerold built the house their son Steve lives in now, taking out a series of small loans for materials and doing the work himself. Before he was called to preach, he worked for pay where he could: on

farms, in mines, at gas stations. When he got the call, he didn't feel qualified to preach, so went back to school. He earned his GED, graduated from a Bible institute, and eventually earned advanced degrees through correspondence courses. He pastored small rural churches, sometimes two at a time, and resigned his final pastorate, at Snow Hill Baptist Church, after he got sick.

There was a quality to Gerold you couldn't miss: a quiet, barely suppressed joy in being alive. He loved a joke. He loved nature. He loved the old ways. He loved building, collecting, sowing and reaping. He loved his family, his community, his God. "He enjoyed whatever he was doing, even if it was work," his sister Joan, two years his junior, says. "I hated hoeing, but Gerold would find something good about it."

Carlean says he saw beauty in everything. "A knotty piece of wood: he'd bring it home and clean and polish it, whether he made it into something or not. He loved pretty things—jewelry—but he loved rocks, too, not just cut and polished stones. And people! He would talk to anyone, for hours. I learned not to let him get hold of the cart in the grocery store."

Although he loved all mountains, Gerold had a particular fondness for the Billy. He acquired the land at its base from his parents, then bought the land higher up from one of his parishioners.

After Gerold got his diagnosis, he told Carlean he was going up on the Billy. Afraid he might have a seizure, she offered to go with him, but he said no. He knew the mountain like he knew his wife's face. He hauled its rock for the curved, dry stone retaining walls he built behind the house. He cut flowers there and brought them to Carlean, clutched in his hands "like a child." Carlean and Gerold hunted ginseng and picked wineberries on the Billy. The day he found leather flower, a wildflower neither of them knew, he led her to where it grew.

Trees from the Billy provided the wood to panel their walls and to build the bed Gerold and Carlean slept in upstairs. When Gerold woke, he threw off the covers, stepped out on the balcony, and shouted, "Hello, world!"

Sitting in his accustomed chair between the woodstove and the window a month before he died, Gerold asked Carlean to find a pencil and a paper. She wrote down what he dictated like a poem, a final testimonial, full of salvaged sound and imagery, shot through with love and loss.

Reminiscing

The passage to the garden gate, years of time,
brings back the wandering of your mind.
It brings back the screech of the gate hinges,
and with the sound comes sometimes the loneliness,
the laughter of the children's gaiety.
Sometimes you can hear the dogs barking
and the children running with joy.
You can hear the splash of the bucket in the spring,
the chickens fluttering in the dust.
Late in the fall, the crickets come to life,
the lightning bugs seeming to come to life,
sharing their mating call.
And the world passes you by.

About a week before Gerold died, Steve decided to take his father to the top of the Billy one last time. Gerold was often confused by then. Steroids bloated his features; he was both restless and weak. Carlean couldn't imagine how her son could get Gerold up there, but Steve said he would take him in his truck.

It was Gerold's last trip, the afternoon of the day he died. For the burial, Carlean and Joan dressed him in comfortable clothes. They put his favorite railroad cap on his head and closed his hands around one of the hammers he's made a handle for. His casket was loaded onto the back of a truck. The ride to the graveyard behind Silver Chapel Baptist Church took him past the homes of his son and his siblings, past the house where he'd been born and raised. In the hours since he'd died, word had gone out, and parishioners, friends, and family had gathered on the hillside. There was no church service, no bought funeral wreaths. His brother Harold spoke a few words, and Joan's son Mark, who had also received the call to preach, laid sprays of forsythia on his grave, facing sunrise over the Billy to the east. ❖

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"Getting Around Appalachia" (vol. 26, no. 2)

Willie the Philologist

Steve Rasnic Tem

Words never came easily for Willie the child, named William then on his records, or Bill to teacher and the rest of that old town of Norton, first official city in Southwest Virginia, named after the president of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. "Willie" came much later, in that long, inarticulate tumble of years toward the end: a name he didn't care for, an insult, which stuck so easily to the lips of the town. But the words, they were hard-won, and prized. When he finally caught one he held onto it, squeezed it as if his life depended, until all its juice was gone. Then he saved the empties as if he might turn them in someday for pocket change.

Bill's passion lay undiscovered and unrecognized, except by his grandfather, who didn't care that Bill was shy, or verging on the slow, with hands and feet a disappointment to his brain. He only cared that it caused him pain.

"Fill your wagon full of words," his grandfather would say, "and drag that wagon with you on your journeys. When you need a proper word, you'll find you have just the one."

Bill knew his grandfather didn't mean a real wagon, but the old man loved to explain.

"I speak in metaphor, of course. Metaphors are strong language, stronger than curses, Bill, carrying as they do their own meaning as well as that of another. You understand that, don't you? About metaphor?"

Bill had been slow to nod. Although he usually managed to catch most of the words thrown at him, it was always a struggle pushing them out to his tongue. "Pa told me, yesterday? He said grab the bull? By the horns?"

"Good boy! You're a regular philologist, Billy!"

Bill blinked slowly. Twice. He'd never heard such a word. His tongue wrestled with it in silence. His panicked brain told him to spit it out—as beautiful as it was, he might choke.

"That means you're a lover of words, Bill! A bona fide lexical romancer!"

Bill smiled. His mother had always said it didn't really matter what Bill couldn't do—the most important thing was to love something. She told him, "That's the one true thing separating us from the lower animals."

Bill wasn't sure which animals were the lower ones. But sometimes she called them "beasts," like in that story she loved about Beauty and the Beast. That was one of the best things about words—they let you love them. You could still love them, even when you didn't understand them. People ought to be like that with each other, but too often were not.

"Metaphor, Bill!" And Bill blinked again, trying to concentrate on the wagons full of words tumbling out of his grandfather's mouth. "About what your father said. Because, you know, there really isn't a bull."

Bill nodded. "No bull. No horns. Nothing I can grab on to."

"Exactly."

"Pa got so excited. When he talked, about the bull horn. It was important for me to understand! Like he wanted—he could make a pretty song! Blowing on that horn! He was enthuse…elastic."

"Enthusiastic."

Bill nodded. "It was like, his arms stretched out, and his hands got all, wobbly, and his eyes got so big. He was all, bent, out of shape."

His grandfather looked sad. "He just wants you to do well."

"I'm okay," Bill said. "I was never sick, except the one time."

When his grandfather died, his mother and his father told him he could have anything he wanted out of the old house up on the ridge. Bill knew what he wanted but gave up trying to put the words together in the right order so they could understand. He wandered around his grandfather's house for days, just like he was sight-seeing, taste-testing, smell-smelling, searching until he found it: a wagon that once was red but now was brown, with a bent axle and a bent handle.

When Bill was little, sometimes his father would say, "You don't stop that, I'm going to fix your wagon, young man." The memory made him smile so big, like his teeth grew until you couldn't see his lips anymore. His father had said he would fix his wagon, when it was his grandfather who had the wagon in need of fixing.

But he was glad his father never fixed this wagon. When Bill dragged it around the block like a flat dog on a leash, it made a sound like a sad flute player who loves a woman so much but he can't find the right words. The wagon never traveled straight down the sidewalk but wandered side to side smelling the grass.

A great wagon like that needed important things to carry so Bill took some of his grandfather's biggest books with hides thick and tough from crawling back and forth across that oak desk.

His father couldn't stop saying why. "Why, Bill, you can't even read those books. Why do you want them? Why, you have no clue what they're saying."

He wanted to tell his father he understood that was just metaphor. The books weren't saying anything, they were just lying now in his wagon asleep, dreaming their own dreams of being carried around fancy libraries in the arms of smiling lady librarians.

And maybe true Bill had no clue but those tough old books had big bellies full of words. He loved each word for itself and didn't care what it said. He didn't say much either but that didn't mean . . . just because he didn't say much didn't mean people didn't have to listen!

Bill was no good at stringing words together, "making a sentence," which, as his grandfather explained, was like being a painter, or a sculptor. But sentences also made Bill think of judges—they made sentences, too, didn't they? Sentences could be sad stories that told you something nice or important happened, and then ended, period. Not being able to make sentences did give him time to admire the different words—they had their own lives, and a music, and a history, even if they weren't connected.

Now sixty years later and the few calling him by name call him Willie, but his Brown Bomber wagon is still that same vehicle of dreams. Its voice is rustier but so is his. It still carries those same big books plus a few passengers: a restaurant menu from where his Pa took him on his birthday the month before he died, a Christmas card with nine rhymes for "day" saved from a trash can, a newspaper telling a lie about someone he used to know, with eight ads for furniture stores, two of them Everything Must Go sales, and a clipped-out magazine story about an actress who died too young. It seemed like actresses were always dying too young and Willie had saved the story of the one to honor them all. A small box in one corner of the wagon holds everything else he owns: changes of socks and underwear, nice pants, toothbrush and soap, cup and plate, knife and spoon, assorted stale bits of food.

Still following his grandfather's words, Willie drags this wagon behind him everywhere he goes, but mainly up and down Park Avenue, Route 58, from the Dairy Queen to the steakhouse and back. Norton is a small place, or so everyone tells him, but it doesn't feel so small when you're on foot dragging your whole life. He has a sister in Atlanta and visited her once, where the people live in houses folded over the top of each other, and the land's shrunk up to gardens and medians and yards. Here they've let the town relax out a little in a wide place in the road, but the mountains on each side show who's boss. It's a fine place to pull a wagon, and no one bothers him—he's never had one book stole. Over the years he has managed to learn to read a little, very little, but he is thankful for even that. He loves just saying the words.

He knows he isn't much more than a bump on the sometimes smiling, sometimes crying face of the earth, and not even as important as the words he loves. Still he won't allow meanness to go unanswered. He knows what rude means, and he never lets it pass without repeating his grandfather's most important advice, "You can't tell a book, Bill, by its cover."

These days he has books to sell, assorted volumes from different sets of encyclopedias he's been letting go a dollar apiece. Mostly they go to teenagers who want to use the pictures or need to write a quick report and can't get to the computer up at the library. But last week a fine looking lady bought the J volume, because she liked junipers, and jellyfish, and

agreed with Willie that Jupiter was the most interesting planet by far.

When people point out that the encyclopedias are old, and out of date, and can't be of much use in the time of the Internet, Willie just tells them how those books hold the history of what our best minds thought, even though they might have got it just a bit wrong, and what a great thing it was, what a marvelous thing, that the thinking of all those historians, all those scientists and philosophers, those philologists, could wind up in a rusty old wagon in the little city of Norton.

Sometimes Willie likes to think of himself as a single word, his favorite being *gregarious*—he learned it back when he was still Bill. His grandfather told him it meant he was still one of the flock. He thought it sounded like he was happy about it, too.

Rue was always another word that said loud and clear things he felt every day, sounding like something to eat, whether you wanted to or not, something you could fill your wagon with, a spoon full of sorrow, a cup of remorse, bowls overflowing with regret.

He also likes *slapstick*, and *pell-mell*, because of their sound. He isn't sure if he understands what either of them means, but he's pretty sure it's the same gang involved.

Most words are like that for Willie: He repeats them over and over for a time, but then their meanings always creep away, as if ashamed of themselves, and all he has left are their carcasses. But like most people, he thinks, it is hard for him to let go of dead things, and in his old age he sings their names aloud over and over in the town with no understanding: *inculcate, belated, ex cathedra,* down one street, then *Parthian, capitulate, cajole* down another, the people staring at him, or walking the other way, some of them laughing, with their own absence of understanding. They can't see that he just loves the words, and with his head back, mouth open, eyes streaming, singing, he has only followed his grandfather's advice and hitched his wagon to a star. ❖

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"The Greening of Appalachia" (vol. 27, no. 1)

The Voice of the Turtle Returns, Sweet and Clear

Dot Jackson

Once upon a time, not so long ago, in a valley of the Southern Appalachian chain, the land was as silent as death. Spring brought no piping chant of peep-frogs, no hum of bees. No Chuck-Will's-Widow drifted on the summer winds, no night-bugs chirred, no enraptured mockingbird sang to the moon.

Even the ripples of the branch were muted, clogged as they were by a century of silt. No willow roots confined the listless, blackened waters, no gum and sycamore offered limbs of shady respite for the birds. No bird was stopping over, anyway. No bugs, no berries, no eats, no shelter. No life.

As it happened with King Midas, who used a magic wish to turn anything he touched into gold, the power that brought such prosperity also brought disaster.

After the 1843 discovery of copper, in a lushly forested and lived-in corner of southeastern Tennessee, at the Georgia and North Carolina state lines, the mining and smelting that followed certainly brought in money, at the expense of just about everything else.

Huge fires that roasted the early ore and separated out the copper, and then the smelter furnaces that "modernized" the job, first ran on wood because there was no easy way to bring in coal. There went the old, native forests, even down to the grubbed-up stumps. Left were the naked red hills, bleeding all their topsoil into the streams. Regrowth was impossible.

By the early 1900s, farmers across the Ocoee River in McCaysville, Georgia, went to the courts for help, in their fury, when, downwind of the sulfuric-acid-belching smelters of neighboring Copperhill, Tennessee, they found not just their farm crops ruined but their woods and pastures brown and dying and fish belly-up in the streams.

Still, there was money to be made. The foggy, sulfurous vapors kept on rising from the smelter chimneys, spewing death over some 50 square miles of the Copper Basin.

When the Tennessee Valley Authority arrived, in the 1930s, to build three dams on the Ocoee River, the scene was like the earth was suffering a monster case of mange. As far as anyone could see, hill after hill, mile after mile, rolled that bare, blighted, gully-wrinkled hide, without a tree or a sprig of grass.

The TVA set up a Civilian Conservation Corps camp there, to try to rehabilitate the land. The young men planted seedlings and sowed grass. Nothing took. Even kudzu cringed and put down not a root. Rain full of sulfuric acid scorched every leaf that tried to grow.

But the mines and smelting plants needed workers. People stayed in the towns of Copperhill, Ducktown, and Isabella. It was their land, deformed though it might be, and many would not leave it, any more than they would have left enfeebled parents. Loyalty was a strong commodity. And most could not remember it any other way.

When my daddy came in to work on TVA's Ocoee dams, in 1941, he brought his family. There we were, jammed into that 1934 Ford, coming from another dam, way across the mountains, with all our necessities in trunks tied on the running boards. I was eight. The land was a mesmerizing sight.

We rode through the towns, noting that there was indeed a drugstore and an A&P, banks, schools, and filling stations. There were kids on the sidewalk, eating ice cream cones. The atmosphere was downright yellow—a strange, pallid translucency that cast an odd light on the faces, highlighting the bones. Local people did not seem alarmed at all.

Out on the old Copper Road, cut high above the river, Daddy pulled the car onto a wide place, to take in the scene. Aunt Bird, ancient and thin beneath her tiny birds nest hat, was plain undone. "They Lord have mercy!" she said. "All my life I've been told about Hell—a burned-up place with black water pouring down the hills. But I never expected to see it in this life."

No one on that journey was keen on living in it. We went on down the river, into some surviving woods where the TVA had built employee housing on the far bank, with a long footbridge for access. My mother had heard on the radio a night or two before about an old wild sow attacking folks and carrying off a child. Somehow that connected in her mind with the community she was seeing.

"Not this place!" she said. "I do not want my children being eaten."

All there was to do was turn around and see what lay beyond Ducktown, on the North Carolina side.

Franklin Mountain, on the border, loomed ahead. At the top, the view was nearly as amazing, toward the other side. It was, to me, the most beautiful, the greenest, the most welcoming country ever in my life. After a couple of stops down where the trees grew tall and the streams were swift and clear, we came to the right dirt road, in Hothouse Township, and the right farmhouse—green pastures and the happiest-ever home for a child.

Anything we wanted, nearly, was up on the highway, just across the creek, at John McAllister's General Mdse. Our mail came there. Dislike of The Government prevented people from having mailboxes at home, so Mr. Kisselberg, the mailman, brought it all to the store, where the McAllisters doled it out.

On that daily errand, we loaded up on bottled Yoo Hoo chocolate, banana flips, and tobacco. Good sturdy shoes were a dollar a pair and dress goods mighty reasonable. If we needed something that was not there, we got a tank of Esso and headed back over Franklin Mountain to Ducktown or on four more miles or so to the metropolis of Copperhill.

Among the city amenities was the office of Dr. Geisler, a fine elderly gentleman who was the health care for employees of the Tennessee Copper Company. When the older boy in our family took pneumonia, Dr. Geisler came the dozen miles to us at Hothouse. He had the new Sulfa miracle drugs in his satchel and came every day for over a week to see the boy, until the crisis passed. My daddy marveled at his bill: $13.

Once when we needed him we couldn't get him. I had fallen sidewise on the red-hot schoolhouse stove and fried a skinny arm from fingertips to shoulder. There were no phones. When we got to Copperhill, the doctor had gone far afield to bring a baby.

We went over to the drugstore, where the druggist looked at the mess, squeezed a tube of something on it, bound it up like a mummy, and told my mother, "Don't unwrap it for six weeks, no matter how dirty it gets." She didn't, and at the appointed unveiling, the healing was mottled perfection.

World War II began that winter. Some of the men were drawn away to construct new military bases. My daddy was sent to Homestead, Florida, to build a home for Navy blimps. And thus we left what had become the homeplace of the heart. Now seventy years later, I still have some little lamps and other gimcracks bought in Copperhill.

Sometimes money—or the ups and downs thereof—can do wondrous things.

When the astronauts ventured into space in the late 1960s, they saw just three manmade scars or outcrops on the Earth: the Great Wall of China, the pyramids of Egypt, and the denuded Copper Basin of eastern Tennessee. A little later, a biological study found only one form of animal life, an insect, surviving in the basin's waters.

The three rich veins of copper ore beneath the basin had not played out, but by the 1980s, they were too expensive to mine. Copper could be imported more cheaply from abroad. And so the age of local copper ended.

The last mining operation closed in 1987. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency took note of the ruins in 1991. When Atlanta hosted the Olympics in 1996, the improved Ocoee River was the site of the whitewater competition. Cleanup work continued through the next decade. Seedlings planted in remedied soil took root and thrived.

We may not yet find great oaks shading the streets of Copperhill. We may not yet hear the wind in massive, aged pines. But we will see green. The land is green enough that tourism has supplanted copper as the major industry of the basin. The Ocoee sparkles, its rapids alive with kayaks and canoes. Hikers camp in newborn wilderness.

The woodthrush calls at the close of day, and the cooing voice of the turtledove is back upon the land. ❖

A career-long journalist with emphasis on environmental reporting, Dot Jackson wrote a single novel, *Refuge*, published in 2006. Now 82, she is on-site manager at Birchwood Center for Arts and Folklife, in Pickens County, SC.

"Serving Appalachia" (vol. 27, no. 2)

Exotic Dancing and the Odds for a Happily Ever After

Edwina Pendarvis

Lady Godiva's Gentleman's Club in Barboursville, West Virginia, shuts down in the daytime. Even at night, lively though the place is, it looks a little fusty and old-fashioned, with hand-painted knights on either side of the front door. The life-size, plastic-looking statue of a white horse that used to stand in the parking lot is gone now. This club is one of a half-dozen or so gentleman's clubs in the area. They open for awhile and then close down, to be replaced by other bars serving up drinks and exotic dancing. Whatever these controversial establishments mean to others, they remind me—Lady Godiva's especially, with its knights-and-ladies theme—of why I'm so sick of the princess fad. Disney princesses, Barbie princesses, princess costumes, and clothing with "Princess" written on them are products of an industry I hope is winding down.

I know parents don't mean any harm when they proclaim their daughters' princesshood, buy them tiaras, and deck them out in princess clothing. Telling girls they're princesses is a way of saying, "You're precious to me." But so *much* attention to princess fantasies may suggest to little girls from better-off families that privilege is their due, and that it's just too bad about those other, *less* precious, girls—including girls who may grow up to find jobs like exotic dancing their best bet for making a decent living.

Not that exotic dancing rules out chances for a "happily ever after." Lots of successful women have made a living that way for a time. Popular actress Goldie Hawn is one example. And, in fact, one of West Virginia's most famous "Cinderella" tales is the life story of Fannie Belle Fleming, better known as Blaze Starr.

Born in 1932 near Twelve Pole Creek in Wayne County, Blaze Starr parlayed her good looks and audacity into national celebrity and a lot more money than she could've made waitressing at places like the bar and grill where she began work at fourteen. At sixteen, she left home to find a better job. She ended up in Washington, D.C., where she worked in a donut shop until a nightclub owner recruited her for his burlesque show. By the time she was seventeen, she'd moved to Baltimore and was performing at the Two O'Clock Club, a nightclub she made famous and, years later, owned.

In her autobiography, Starr says she wanted to be in show business like her cousin, Molly O'Day, a popular country singer. She wanted her parents to be able to brag about her: "I went out and bought myself a pair of high heels and in the privacy of my little room I practiced bumps and grinds night after night. . . . I wanted to become a star, and stripping looked like my best opportunity."

At first she didn't tell her parents she was a stripper. She said she did "exotic dancing." Back then, the term was used for traditional belly dancing and dramatic dancing, as well as for striptease performances. Today it covers go-go dancing, table dancing, pole dancing, and lap dancing.

The bright, pretty, and curvaceous Blaze Starr was a smash hit. An *Esquire* reporter who featured her in an article on Baltimore's strip clubs for the February 1954 issue of the "magazine for men" described her this way:

> A redhead, Blaze Starr, is one of the current sensations. She is as healthy and rounded as a peach just off the bough, and her sinuous and sophisticated writhings don't fool the boys a bit. They know that under that fresh and plump skin she is really the girl next door, putting on an act while the folks are away. . . Blaze is the prize of Baltimore.

Starr got attention from the media again when flamboyant (and married) Louisiana Governor Earl Long caught her act at the Sho-Bar in New Orleans and apparently fell in love with her. Their notorious affair helped her career as a stripper considerably more than it helped his as governor, but he left her $50,000 in his will. She didn't accept the money—too many people had accused her of caring more about Long's money than about the man himself.

I've never seen Starr in person; the closest I've come was seeing *Blaze*, the movie about her life. She has a cameo role and two words, "Hello, Governor," spoken to actor Paul Newman.

I've only known two exotic dancers in real life. One is my sister Margie. But her dancing wasn't nearly as exotic as Starr's, and her exotic dancing career lasted just a few weeks.

When Margie was six and I was eight, our family moved from Wharton, West Virginia, to Pikeville, Kentucky. Mother took us right away to sign up for ballet lessons. By this time, we'd worn out several crepe-paper tutus she'd made so we could "p'like" (play like) we were ballerinas. Ballerinas were *our* favorite "princesses," but the coal towns we lived in before we moved to Pikeville didn't have dancing schools.

We took ballet together for awhile, then I dropped out. Margie never considered quitting. She was eleven when we moved to Orlando, Florida, where she spent every afternoon, after school, in the ballet studio. Six years later, a talent scout from the School of American Ballet in New York chose her for a summer scholarship. As soon as she graduated from high school, she headed for New York City.

That summer of 1964, Margie and her friend, Janet, another ballet student, explored Manhattan. By August, they'd found an apartment together, and as soon as summer dance classes ended, they looked for work. Armed with high-school shorthand, Margie got a job as secretary to Bonwit Teller's credit manager. She liked the job, but the day she turned eighteen, she and Janet auditioned to be go-go dancers at a classy discotheque in midtown Manhattan. The owner of The Ginza and his manager, a Japanese woman called "Mama-san," decided that the two girls would do nicely. They could start right away, dancing from noon to seven for the lunch and cocktail crowds.

A little apprehensive about dancing in a suspended cage in a nightclub, Margie decided she'd take the job if Janet did. After all, she told herself, it wasn't a sleazy place, and she wouldn't be dancing at night. Besides, it paid twice as much as her job at Bonwit's. The costumes for the dancers weren't so *very* abbreviated, and the go-go boots were cute.

She and Janet ponied, twisted, mash-potatoed, and Watusied to hits like "Hey, You, Get Offa My Cloud." In time with the beat, they jumped from one platform to another. Customers enjoyed their act, and the two girls took pride in their status as the youngest dancers at the discotheque. The Asian kitchen staff looked after them, pampering them with food and attention during their breaks.

Pleasant as it was, Margie knew go-go dancing didn't offer much chance for promotion. She went on to better jobs and, trained in ballet, finally ended up at the place she'd come to New York to be part of, the American School of Ballet. There she planned programs, coordinated ballet workshops, and went on cross-country audition tours, like the one in 1964 when she'd been selected for a summer scholarship. She's lived what many women would consider a fairy-tale life, even if it wasn't movie material.

If exotic dancing worked out for Blaze Starr and for my own sister, why my peevishness about princesses? Because only one in a blue million exotic dancers could earn the fame that Blaze Starr achieved. And because, in today's economy, not many women can take up exotic dancing as a lark, as Margie did, and then move on to more secure, better-paying jobs. The rich few are richer and fewer now, and the poor masses are more . . . massive. Wealth disparity is greater than ever before. According to the 2010 census, four southeastern Kentucky counties are among the ten poorest in the country. More girls are growing up in families there and in other Appalachian counties today without enough money for even modest luxuries, like the ballet lessons my sister and I took when we lived in Pikeville. A lot of young women consider themselves lucky to earn enough money to subsist by doing exotic dancing, but their work isn't likely to be at a fancy discotheque with friendly kitchen staff. These days, here in Appalachia and elsewhere, seedy bars offering lap dances proliferate off interstate exit ramps and along streets in almost every city and town. They're the best venues some women can look forward to.

A friend tells me exotic dancing's a cushy job for women who can't or won't go to college. Cushy compared to *what* is the question. Nightclub owners often hire exotic dancers as independent

contractors and don't pay into their Social Security, much less pay toward their health insurance or offer sick leave. Dancers may have to earn a quota toward club expenses—tips for bouncers, for example. In some clubs, the dancers are fined for being late, for calling in sick, or for "talking back" to customers. Exotic dancers are vulnerable to rudeness, ridicule, and violence. And abuse isn't new to many of them. Statistics vary, but studies say somewhere between sixty and ninety percent of the dancers were abused as children. Not many are celebrated by the media or have a governor fall for them. They're much more likely to have a life like Teresa's.

Teresa is the only other exotic dancer I know. She rented a trailer out in the country from me a couple of years ago. She liked it there and kept the place neat, repainted every room, and furnished the whole thing simply and prettily. She had a little baby, two or three months old, and a husband or boyfriend who didn't appear to help pay the rent. When she and I first met, she told me she worked at the Gentleman's Club in Huntington and hoped I wouldn't refuse to rent to her because of that. She always handed me the rent in cash.

Teresa reminds me of my sister a little. Smart, capable, and pretty—slender but strong looking, with shoulder-length brown hair, brown eyes, and a scattering of freckles across her nose and cheekbones.

She liked the low rent and the big, fenced-in yard with hills and pastures all around. She loved how quiet the place was. But she stayed there less than six months. She couldn't keep her old car running well enough to be sure of getting to town and back. When her car broke down a couple of miles from the trailer one day, and she had to walk home carrying the baby, not a soul offered her a lift. Another time, the car wouldn't start when she got off work, and she had to take a cab home. Fifty or sixty dollars, I'd guess. Maybe it was unrealistic of her to move out of town in the first place, but she'd hoped to manage it. Despite her "cushy job," she couldn't afford to live in a cheap, single-wide trailer in the country.

The last time I saw Teresa she was just getting off work and looked worn out. It was about ten in the morning, and she had on stage makeup. In an economy so harsh that her job is cushy compared to the jobs some people have to take on and still not earn a decent wage, extolling little princesses and spending literally billions of dollars a year for princess toys and costumes isn't just innocent play. It's an insult to poor girls and women. Maybe there'll come a time when every girl is treated as precious, a time when every girl has a fair chance for health and happiness. But that's not the way things are now or in the foreseeable future. ❖

Edwina Pendarvis lives in Huntington, West Virginia, where she taught at Marshall University for thirty years. Her publications include books of educational research, poetry, memoir, and biography. Most of her poems and essays are collected in regional periodicals and anthologies, such as *Now & Then*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, and *The Southern Poetry Anthology*.

"Nuevo Appalachia" (vol. 28, no. 1)

Looking for a Home

Maggie McKinney

I assumed that the young Latina mother seemed slightly distraught because she had all five children with her at her first parent-teacher conference at Tipton Hill School in Mitchell County, North Carolina.

She held the baby on her hip with one hand and fiddled with her long black hair with the other. She alternately shushed the children dancing and giggling around her and listened to the report about her only school-age child.

"Jose has made remarkable improvement," the first-grade teacher said and I translated. "It's amazing since he started school knowing almost no English."

The mother thanked her and asked only if there were anything more she needed to do at home.

When we left the classroom I casually asked how everything was going.

"I am so worried," she said. "We must find a place to rent."

I had visited their isolated home at Poplar, miles and curvy miles from a reasonably-priced grocery store. While there, I thought how lonely it must be for a woman whose husband worked long hours and whose nearest neighbors spoke no Spanish.

"I can see why you'd want to move," I said. "Your house is a long drive from everywhere."

"A better location would be good," she agreed. "But the problem is we have no water. The well has run dry."

At home, I checked the classifieds, made a few calls, and found not a single lead. The following weekend when my husband and I went to get a Christmas tree, I noticed the trailer on a gravel road where Mexican friends of mine once lived. The place looked deserted. I wondered if it was, perhaps, for rent.

My husband drove up a hill lined with neat rows of Fraser firs to a house near the top. While he cut our tree, the woman of the house invited me in. She served me tea in a large, glassed-in sunroom that overlooked trees and the trailer below.

"Who's renting the Lorenzo trailer now?" I asked.

"No one," she said. "We miss the Lorenzos. They were good neighbors."

"Do you think the owner wants to rent?" I asked.

She thought he might. She gave me his phone number.

When I got home, I called. The owner said that work needed to be done on the place, but that he was open to having the family help. He could show it the next day. The rent would be between $200 and $300 a month, depending on how much work the husband was willing to do.

I called the family, and I warned them that the trailer was not pretty and not in good shape. I told them the price. They wanted to see it.

They drove thirty-five minutes to my house and followed me ten more minutes in their van to the trailer. When we arrived, I noticed the house more critically than before. A nearby decaying shed held what looked like trash and broken machinery dangerous to children. A built-on porch led to the single-wide trailer, which was old and dilapidated. I was glad I had warned the family that it "wasn't pretty."

The owner and his wife were waiting for us. After introductions—the five children in the van included—we adults went into the house. It was a bitterly cold, windy day, and I was anxious to get inside, but without heat or electricity, even inside I was miserable. Again, I looked at the place with new eyes, partly because

the miscellaneous furniture of the previous family had disguised a great deal and partly because I was responsible for this family being here.

The floor, partially covered by a gray, ripped linoleum, was uneven and shaky. It felt as though it might collapse at any moment.

"We'll have to fix this floor," the owner's wife told me.

The kitchen was a makeshift affair, with an aged sink and a few cabinets with doors that would not close. The stove and refrigerator looked fine, but the rest of the kitchen was impossible by my standards. The wind howled through broken windows.

I had never seen the bedrooms. One was half the size of the smallest bedroom in my house. The "master" bedroom was large enough for a bed—at least a full-sized mattress—but not a chest of drawers. I could not imagine room to stand to get dressed. The bathroom had a rusted sink and toilet side by side and a stand-up shower with no tub.

I thought that the family could not possibly want this place. Any moment the floors would cave in. Small children couldn't take showers. Even someone with the best intentions could not make the place livable.

"How much you want?" the man asked the owner.

"Tell him I'll take $200 if he'll help fix it up, with a $150 deposit," the owner said.

The man did not consult his wife. "I will take," he said and counted out $150. He added that he'd like to move in within three weeks.

The owner said I needed to tell them to buy bottled water to drink. The spring might have poison in it because of all the chemicals used on the surrounding Christmas trees.

Without thinking, I said that the water would have to be tested before they moved in. If the owner couldn't do it, I would. I didn't want to bring anyone into a place with poison water, particularly someone with five children.

"Oh, we can check the water," said the owner's wife.

Next, the owner said he couldn't get windows in three weeks but suggested that he could get plastic that was "as good as windows."

"It's winter," I said. "They'll need real windows."

After I got home to my appallingly large house with its solid floors, I could not get that trailer out of my mind.

When I was young, we were poor by local standards. At one point my father made $50 a week for our family of seven. We lived in an aged, brown-siding house with one bathroom and two porches in disrepair. The kitchen had no counters, the walls had cracks. The upstairs was icy cold in winter.

I re-pictured my childhood home in a way I had never done—its level hardwood floors, large bedrooms, living and dining rooms. A family willing to take that miserable trailer would have thought my childhood home rich.

That night I had trouble getting to sleep. How miserable seven people would be crammed into that small trailer.

The next day, the owner called me. He had changed his mind, he said. Due to recent surgeries and other health problems, he probably didn't have the energy. He thought he would sell the land, perhaps to the people who owned the house above, for they had expressed interest in it. He offered to pay the Latino family for the gas they'd used for their fruitless effort if I thought he should.

I thought he should.

He asked me to call them and explain.

Now I was miserable, thinking about having to tell them they couldn't get a house that I had thought they ought not want anyway.

First I called everyone I could think of. I got a few not very promising leads. One potential landlord said she would "pray about it."

I talked to the head of Shepherd's Staff, the Christian ministry. She told me which landlords to avoid. One, she said, fixed things once for HUD and never fixed them again. She told me the Spruce Pine Motel was going to close the next month, forcing more people to look for housing.

I talked to a minister's wife who does incredible work helping Latinos. She did not know of any available rentals. She suggested that maybe prejudice had changed the man's mind.

"I don't think so," I said. "He knew ahead of time they were Latino. He's rented before to Latinos."

No. I knew what had caused his change of heart: my critical comments about the windows and the water.

I dreaded calling the family. When finally I did, the husband answered. I explained. He responded as if this were just another expected event, as if he were used to being denied everything.

The owner of the trailer sent me a check for the deposit and

gas money, and I took it to the mother. Shortly afterward, to the disappointment of his first-grade teacher, the little boy stopped coming to school. The school secretary heard that the family had moved to Tennessee. I never saw them again.

Except in my mind.

It is like a kaleidoscope that I keep turning and trying to find the right picture. I've gone over it and over it. I still don't know what I should have done.

But I do know this: When I hear or read of anger or harsh laws against undocumented workers living in the United States, the kaleidoscope stops on a father and a mother with five children, searching for a home, any home, no matter how bleak. ❖

A former English and Spanish teacher in the public schools, Maggie McKinney presently teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) through the Burke Literacy Council and works with immigrants adjusting to a new culture. A regular columnist for *The News Herald* of Morganton, N.C., she has had work published in a variety of magazines and newspapers.

"Global Appalachia" (vol. 28, no. 2)

Asia-lachia

Berlin Fang

Three years after my last visit, I returned to my hometown in Tongcheng, in Anhui Province, China. I had a good time visiting family and friends, and I also felt reconnected to a vertically diverse area after living in Oklahoma where the world is mostly flat. I hiked to the mountains, feeling like Bill Bryson walking on the Appalachian Trail. As the road wound its way uphill, I started to think of the country roads from Huntington to Hillsboro, Logan, Beckley, and to Maysville in northern Kentucky. As I passed a mountaintop jade mine, I remembered debates about surface mining in West Virginia. There were times I mistook the pink blossoms beside the road to be dogwood in Huntington, West Virginia's Ritter Park on a bright morning in May. It almost felt as though I returned to one hometown and got another one for free.

I am a Chinese, but I felt at home in West Virginia—where I lived from 2005 to 2008—mostly due to the similarities in the landscape, the sense of place, and the closeness of family and friends. There I read a collection of poems called *Like the Mountains of China*, by Edwina Pendarvis, that expressed feelings a lot like mine. Years ago, my advisor in graduate school, Professor Liu Haiping from Nanjing University, came to Pearl Buck's birthplace in Hillsboro, West Virginia, for a visit, and he said the landscape in West Virginia reminded him of the paintings of ancient China where mountains and rivers are favorite subjects. An ancient saying in China summarizes intellectuals' and artists' fascination with the mountains and water bodies: "The kind love mountains, the wise love waters." Ancient Chinese believed that the place you choose to live in shapes your character and the meaning you make of life.

During the years in West Virginia, I think I became an Appalachian. I heard from a colleague at Marshall that the place is like a "black hole," which keeps drawing people back though they might choose to leave in their younger years to find job opportunities elsewhere. There is something about the mountains and rivers and railroad tracks and coalmines that are so etched in one's heart that no other place has the ability to overwrite them. Once in Appalachia, always an Appalachian.

Years after leaving, I feel the pull of the "black hole" has not weakened one bit as time went by. It has actually grown. Or am I just getting old and nostalgic? That would not be a bad thing either, because lucky is the man who feels he belongs somewhere in this age of drifters and wanderers.

When I first moved to West Virginia, it did not seem to be a favorite place for a Chinese to live in. I could even count the Chinese families in Huntington as there were so few of them. To get the groceries for some Chinese cooking, we had to drive fifty miles, to Charleston, to find a store. Authentic Chinese food was about a three-hour drive away in Kentucky. However, I found the place very warm toward us outsiders and passers-by who chose to live in this place at least for a while. It is said that only in New York does a foreigner feel that he or she is not treated differently. West Virginia defies this myth by treating you like family. In the three years while I was there, I felt I was as much a part of the place as if I had always lived there.

This was not superficial hospitality incapable of morphing into a real relationship. People were sincerely interested in learning more about us, contrary to the anticipation in many other places that we, as foreigners in the land, have no other business except to do our

job and spend the rest of the time learning about the good things in America. While we were there, people reached out to include us into the community. Huntington Public Library invited my wife Fontaine and quite a number of other friends to have a "Chinese Day." We were also frequently invited to speak to middle or elementary schools about China or Chinese traditions. The Norway Avenue Church of Christ even allowed us to start a Chinese school, where we taught Chinese to Chinese kids, kids adopted from China, and local adults who were interested in Chinese culture. I am not exactly a poet by anyone's standard, but I was invited to a poets' club in the tri-state area, and I was asked to read poems from China. As an instructional design specialist, I occasionally helped Appalachian scholars trying to adapt their courses online for a wider audience, while they helped me polish my translation of poems from rural China.

I sometimes felt curious as to why there was such an interest in China and the Chinese people, but later I realized they must treat others the same. It's just a loving community that wants to extend its welcome to friends from faraway places, which happens to echo something said by Confucius: "What a joy it is to see friends coming from afar!" The black hole of Appalachia sucks us all into it and you barely notice it.

This interest is reciprocal. I started to learn more about the area. In spite of hillbilly stereotypes I sometimes heard of, I felt a strong sense of pride among local people, as shown in the annual Spring Festival, the Kenova Pumpkin House, choruses in the Art Museum during Christmas, and theatrical productions in Ritter Park on summer evenings. It is unbelievable to me that one town as small as Huntington (remember I am from a country where a medium city usually has millions of people) can come up with so much festivity, all unique and highly enjoyable. West Virginia has an identity of its own, and it does not want to be an imitation of some other place. Sensing such pride, I started to fight an uphill battle in calling for an end to the rapid urbanization of China's countryside into characterless towns and cities. I've written much about this topic in recent years for Chinese media, and I owe my awareness of its importance to the teachings from people in the West Virginia mountains.

As I experienced Appalachia in its daily goings on, I also read books about Appalachia and West Virginia. With great interest, I read books like *The Unquiet Earth* by Denise Giardina and *In the Heart of the Hills* by Dwight Harshbarger. I wrote and published reviews about some of these books for my Chinese readers. Once, when I was reading one of these books, a colleague thought I was odd, a Chinese reading about Appalachia. "What for?" she laughed.

I don't know the answer. Or, do I need one? Today, as I sat on the benches of a gym watching my kids skate in a skating rink in Edmond, Oklahoma, I found myself reading the article about sheep production in North Carolina's Watauga and Ashe counties in a recent issue of the *Appalachian Journal* and thinking about my family at the foot of Chinese hills, their farming practices and choices. Across the big pond of the Pacific Ocean, similarities abound. In the cold air in the gym, I felt a two-fold homesickness, for my rural hometown in China and for West Virginia, where eagles fly over the beautiful mountains, rivers, and bridges. And I think of myself as a lucky man, having lived in two places that are almost heaven. ❖

Berlin Fang is the Director of Instructional Design for Abilene Christian University. He lived in Huntington, West Virginia, between 2005 and 2008, working at Marshall University, where he developed strong interests in Appalachian literature. He also translates American novels into Chinese.

"Appalachian Industry (vol. 29, no. 1)

Printer's Ink and Blood

Wayne Winkler

In the summer of 1966, David Stephenson had been living a quiet life in the town of Jonesboro, Tennessee. (The town hadn't yet reverted to its original colonial spelling, Jonesborough.) The heavyset, balding seventy-four-year-old was a writer and printer and sold a device he had invented to clean type. On a hot June afternoon, Stephenson stepped from his car carrying a basket of fruit for his wife. Before he reached the door of his home, he fell to the ground clutching his chest. His wife Martha rushed out of the house and held him in her arms as he died.

Stephenson was new to Jonesboro, and nobody knew much about his background. But he had married a widow, Martha Murray Sutton, who was well known and highly regarded in the community. Mrs. Stephenson had taught in public schools and Sunday school at the First Presbyterian Church. Largely out of respect for her, David Stephenson's funeral was attended by many of Jonesboro's most prominent citizens. The mayor of Jonesboro, Lyle Haws, served as a pallbearer, as did future town alderman Jimmy Rhein.

"He was just a very nice person," Rhein recalls. "He was a perfect gentleman and seemed to be very well liked. It just bowled everybody over when that came out years later."

"That" was the secret of David Stephenson's prior life, a secret that no one in town, not even his wife, knew about as they laid Stephenson to rest at the National Cemetery on the grounds of Mountain Home Veterans Administration Center in neighboring Johnson City. David Stephenson had been the leader of the notorious Ku Klux Klan, had virtually controlled the state of Indiana, and had been imprisoned for murder, setting off a scandal that eventually broke the power of the Klan in its most widespread incarnation.

David Curtiss Stephenson was born in Houston on August 21, 1891. He grew up in Maysville, Oklahoma, where as a teenager he acquired a reputation as a "ladies man." He began his career as a printer and newspaperman and got involved in politics as a Socialist, stumping the state for the Socialist candidate for governor, Fred Holt. After Holt's defeat, Stephenson drifted across Oklahoma, picking up work at newspapers and searching for his future. He married Nettie Hamilton in 1915 and became an editor for the *Madill Record*. Soon after his wife informed him they were going to have a baby, Stephenson lost his job and left town, telling his wife he would send for her when he found work. He never did; he kept drifting just beyond her reach, and she finally sued for divorce in 1917. Shortly after that, Stephenson joined the Army. Assigned to officer's training, he got no closer to the fighting than Camp Devins, Massachusetts, and he was honorably discharged as a second lieutenant in February 1919. When discussing his military service later, Stephenson would promote himself to "major."

He landed a job as a traveling salesman for a company that made printing equipment. He met and married Violet Carroll, and in 1920 the newlyweds moved to Evansville, Indiana, where Stephenson soon took a job as a salesman with a coal brokerage firm. He was described as a "super-salesman," well-liked, with an ability to talk to people at all levels of society, and an ability to make friends. Soon he was at the center of a group of young army veterans who wanted to start a fraternal order. Recognizing the potential for

profit in such an organization—a percentage of the dues payments along with an interest in the sale of books and manuals, pins, ribbons, and awards—Stephenson threw himself into the project but soon recognized an even greater opportunity with an organization just beginning to make itself known in Indiana.

The Ku Klux Klan originally formed in the wake of the Civil War. Some die-hard Southerners, neo-Confederates, and those whose view of the Civil War comes from *Gone With the Wind* might argue that the Klan was formed to defend the rights of whites in the defeated South and to protect helpless widows and orphans from the depredations of the newly-freed slaves and the Yankee carpetbaggers who encouraged those depredations. Others would assert that the original Klan was a terrorist organization bent of preserving the political power of the Southern aristocracy while denying African Americans their rights as American citizens. In any event, the first incarnation of the Klan flared fiercely but briefly in the defeated Confederate states and had virtually disappeared by the early 1870s.

A second incarnation of the Klan formed in Atlanta in 1915. Directing its efforts exclusively to white Protestants, the new KKK preached "one hundred percent Americanism" and targeted Catholics, Jews, and foreigners more than African Americans. By the early 1920s, the Klan had adopted a businesslike system of recruitment, with a percentage of dues going directly to the recruiter. By presenting itself as an ultra-patriotic and nativist fraternal organization, in favor of Prohibition and opposed to immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and labor unions, the new Klan spread far outside the old Confederacy, with its biggest membership in the Midwest. At its peak in the mid-1920s, an estimated fifteen percent of eligible Americans were members.

Stephenson became a recruiter for the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana and quickly got rich. Starting in Evansville and Vanderburgh County (where an estimated twenty-three percent of the native-born white male joined), he soon moved to Indianapolis and continued recruiting while starting a Klan newspaper, *The Fiery Cross*. In Evansville, Stephenson had tried unsuccessfully to run for Congress as a Democrat. Soon after moving to Indianapolis, he became Republican. It wasn't long before the Klan controlled the state Republican Party.

Stephenson backed Texas dentist Hiram Evans when Evans unseated founding "Imperial Wizard" William Simmons late in 1922. At a huge Klan rally in Kokomo on the Fourth of July, 1923, Stephenson was named "Grand Dragon" for the state of Indiana. He soon controlled the Klan in twenty-two states, but his power was greatest in his home state. He once boasted, "I am the law in Indiana." He may not have literally been the law, but he certainly had a great deal of influence among the lawmakers. An estimated half of the legislature was controlled by the Klan, as well as many local offices.

Just a few months after being named "Grand Dragon," Stephenson broke with the national Klan and formed his own Klan organization. With only a few exceptions, all the Indiana chapters he had controlled allied with Stephenson's Klan organization. His fellow Klansman, Secretary of State Ed Jackson, ran successfully for governor with Stephenson's backing and took office in January 1925.

Stephenson's second wife obtained a divorce in February 1924, citing "cruelty." He had many amorous encounters with women, some of whom later complained that he was rough with them, especially when he had been drinking. (Like many prominent supporters of Prohibition, Stephenson did not seem to feel that the law applied to him.) At least one woman complained that Stephenson had bitten her. By the time of the new governor's inaugural, Stephenson had taken up with a twenty-eight-year-old state employee, Madge Oberholtzer, who was apparently flattered by the attentions of such a powerful figure.

On the evening of Sunday, March 15, 1925, Stephenson invited Oberholtzer to his home. She later claimed he forced her to take a couple of drinks, which affected her strongly and made her nauseated. Along with some of Stephenson's aides, they boarded a train bound for Chicago. In a private compartment, Stephenson attacked Oberholtzer, who later stated, "I did not know and do not remember all that happened. He chewed me all over my body, bit my neck and face, chewing my tongue, chewing my breasts until they bled, my back, my legs, my ankles, and mutilated me all over my body."

The party left the train before it got to Chicago, disembarking in Hammond, Indiana, where they checked into a hotel. In the morning, Oberholtzer asked Stephenson for some money to buy a hat and some cosmetics. Instead of buying cosmetics, she bought a

box of mercury chloride tablets at a drugstore. Dissolved in water, mercury chloride was commonly used as a disinfectant. Oberholtzer swallowed a half dozen of the tablets and became violently ill.

Stephenson, Oberholtzer, and two bodyguards drove back to Indianapolis on Monday evening, and one the bodyguards took the desperately ill young woman home on Tuesday. According to the family attorney, Madge Oberholtzer told her mother, "I'm done for." When the attorney asked who had made the bite marks on her body, she replied, "Stephenson."

Oberholtzer didn't die right away; she lingered for nearly a month—long enough for her attorney to get her statement about what happened to her. Doctors weren't as concerned about the mercury poisoning, which would cause kidney failure, as they were about the staph infection caused by the bites. In those days before antibiotics, infection was often fatal.

David Stephenson was arrested and charged with kidnapping and assault. When Madge Oberholtzer died on April 14, the charge became murder. The only defense his lawyers put forth was that the young woman had died by her own hand by taking mercury; prosecutors argued that infection from the bites was the cause of death. In a highly-publicized trail, Stephenson's two accomplices were acquitted, but Stephenson was found guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison.

He did not testify at his trial. Later he claimed that he feared for his life after having been threatened by the Klan. Others felt his lawyers kept him off the stand to prevent potentially damaging cross-examination. And it is likely that Stephenson thought his good friend, Governor Ed Jackson, would pardon him. But no pardon was forthcoming, and as Stephenson realized his fellow Klansman was abandoning him, he began talking to the newspapers.

The resulting scandal caused several officials to resign. The mayor on Indianapolis was convicted of bribery and served thirty days in jail. Governor Jackson was spared a prison term due to a technicality, served out the remainder of his term, and dropped out of political life altogether. The power of the Klan in Indiana, and across the nation, was broken and membership dropped to almost nothing. *The Indianapolis Times* won a Pulitzer Prize for its reporting on Klan corruption in Indiana.

Stephenson later claimed he had been framed by officials under the influence of Klansmen loyal to Hiram Evans, and that Oberholtzer died as the result of a botched abortion. Testimony in Stephenson's trail revealed that death from swallowing a relatively low amount of mercury chloride was rare. However, mercury chloride was often used as a douche to induce abortion, and fatalities were more common in those cases. Researchers have found evidence that could support Stephenson's claims of a frame-up. In any event, he remained in prison until he was paroled in 1950. He promptly broke parole by leaving the state, was arrested in Minneapolis, and sentenced to serve ten more years. He was paroled again in 1956, moved to Seymour, Indiana, and married his third wife, Martha Dickinson.

In 1961, Stephenson was arrested in Independence, Missouri, and charged with attempting to molest a sixteen-year-old girl. He paid a $300 fine and returned to his wife in Seymour. But in 1962 he left Indiana, never to return. The following year he came to the V.A. Center in Johnson City for medical treatment and settled in Jonesboro.

"He married the woman that was my fifth-grade schoolteacher," says Jim Rhein. Martha Murray was from an old, respected family in Jonesboro. She was widowed from a man named Sutton when she met Stephenson. "She was a really good person—taught school most of her life. He breezed into town sometime in the early 1960s. They met, had a little courtship. They seemed to hit it off and got married," Rhein recalls. The new Mrs. Stephenson knew nothing about her new husband's infamous past, including the fact that he was still legally married to the former Martha Dickinson.

"He got her a new car and took care of her," Rhein remembers. "He was a very courtly gentleman, very nice to be around. He liked to take a drink every now and then; he liked a little Tennessee sippin' whiskey." Rhein can't recollect for certain, but he believes Stephenson wrote a newspaper story on the death of Rhein's father. Stephenson did some writing for the Jonesboro *Herald and Tribune*, but for the most part he was at least semi-retired.

The truth about Stephenson's past didn't come out until sometime after his death. A reporter for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* was writing about Stephenson's reign over the Indiana Klan and tracked him to Jonesborough. Rhein remembers

the people of Jonesborough were "shocked and surprised" to learn the facts and were also protective of his widow "because she was such a sweet, nice person." Mrs. Stephenson was certainly surprised and embarrassed to learn of her late husband's past. "But I do know this," Rhein asserts. "She knew he liked her and was good to her. He bought her a new car, and they liked to go places and socialize, and have people in to visit. I think she enjoyed all that. I know it was better than being lonely and not having anyone."

Whatever David Stephenson had been in his life, for the last few years of that life he was apparently a devoted husband and a respected, well-liked member of the community. He served more years in prison than most people convicted of even more serious crimes; by nearly any measure, his debt to society had been paid. Perhaps he was entitled to enjoy his last few years in relative quiet. But the secrets of his reign over the notorious Invisible Empire, and the roles played by prominent politicians and others, were buried with him in a veterans cemetery. ❖

Wayne Winkler is the director of WETS-FM/HD, East Tennessee State University's public radio station. He is also the author of *Walking Toward the Sunset: The Melungeons of Appalachia.*

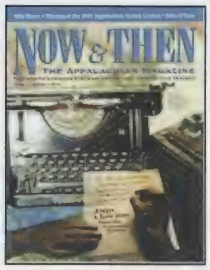
"The Power of Illness and the Promise of Health in Appalachia" (vol. 17, no. 1)

1953

Ron Rash

There was danger enough there,
bottom-snagged hooks, bottle jags,
the drop-off that drowned Lee Gregg,
and that summer a belief
disease was easy to catch
as knottyheads where current
slowed and pooled, made a blue hole
beneath the bridge, so grown-ups
forbade that place and children
those long dog days could only
hold in their minds the grapevine's
swing and let go, the cold rush
clamping their chests as they rose
gasping for breath while parents
sweated out August, at night
dreamed of rows of iron lungs
rising from hospital floors
like enemy submarines

Ron Rash is the author of the 2009 PEN/Faulkner Finalist and *New York Times* bestselling novel *Serena*, in addition to four other prizewinning novels; four collections of poems; and five collections of stories, among them *Burning Bright* and *Chemistry and Other Stories*.Twice the recipient of the O. Henry Prize, he teaches at Western Carolina University.



"Always a Love Story: Fiction from the Appalachian Mountains" (vol. 18, no. 2)

Fiddle

James Still

The silver light that dances on your strings
Runs like melting snow from knotted twigs,
Burning the greying hours with fire-spun wings
And stirring a pith of words into your melody.
The groined and vaulted ceiling of your song
Measures the sky with swift and anxious feet, —
O supple as white oak staves your balladry.

You are the strident lute, the harp upon the hill
Lighting veins of clay against the chimney's breast.
You are unspoken pain, spurned words that fill
The heart to bursting in a thorny cove.
And you can dance a lively galliard at your will,
Or turn again with sudden blossoming bow
To a cardinal flaming in a redbud grove.

The poem "Fiddle" appeared in James Still's book *From the Mountain, From the Valley: New and Collected Poems* (University Press of Kentucky, 2001). Still's now-classic novel *River of Earth* earned him the Southern Author's Award.

"Digging Appalachia"
(vol. 23, no. 1)

Global Economy

George Ella Lyon

They are at their sweatshop
in a remote area of Jordan
while I am at my desk
wearing cheap jeans from Target.

I am at my desk
wearing cheap jeans from Target
because they are at their sweatshop
in a remote area of Jordan.

The dragline driver gouges
coal from the blasted mountain
while I am cool and clean
in my little upstairs office.

I am cool and clean
in my little upstairs office
because the dragline driver gouges
coal from the blasted mountain.

Hot water
Cool air
Cheap clothes

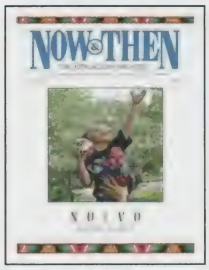
Hot water
Cool air
Cheap clothes

Two dozen workers struggle
in a tiny space for sleeping
while I luxuriate
in a huge smooth bed

which I can afford
because of cheap jeans from Target
and cheap coal from Hazard
and other peoples' suffering

where I rest easy
while the mountain is dying
and the workers cough the dust
of my plenty from their lungs.

George Ella Lyon, a native of Harlan County, Kentucky, is a freelance writer and teacher currently living in Lexington. She is the author of thirty-five books for children and adults and is the 2015-2016 poet laureate of Kentucky.



"Nuevo Appalachia"
(vol. 28, no. 1)

Of Jíbaros and Hillbillies

Ricardo Nazario y Colón

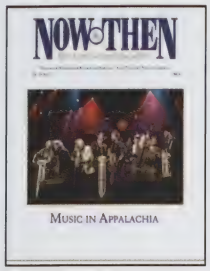
The people of the forest speak with a natural wisdom.
Though thousands of miles apart, they find understanding
in the healing powers of Yerbas Buenas.

Call them Curandos, Jíbaros and Hillbillies.
Birthed in the land and raised by mountains,
they know what it means to live overshadowed
in a place where so many green things grow.

Scots-Irish, African-Andalucian and Cherokee-Taíno blood
forged them into poets, composers, and great storytellers.
They delight in the flavor of chocolate gravy,
pimento cheese, and the warmth of fresh cow's milk.

From the method of seasoning a black iron skillet
to the baroque manner in which a man courts a woman,
la pobreza de ser campesino no es lo que nos une
si no, la dignida de una vida sencilla.

Ricardo Nazario y Colón is a co-founder of the Affrilachian Poets and author of the books *Of Jíbaros and Hillbillies* (Plain View Press, 2011) and *The Recital (*Winged City Press, 2011). Currently he works at Morehead State University in Eastern Kentucky.



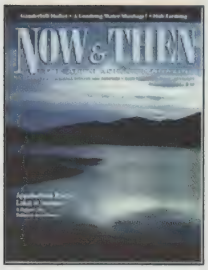
"Music in Appalachia"
(vol. 29, no. 2)

Road to Arcadia

Robert Morgan

When I was stubborn at the age
of two or three, refusing to
lie down for nap or rest – my play
too colorful and various,
too dissonant and multiple,
to turn away from, time too rich
with possibility to yield –
my mother knew just what to do.
She'd take a seat beside the fire
and pat her lap and start to sing.
It could be any song at all,
a hymn, or carol, Stephen Foster.
I can't explain the powerful pull,
the magnetism of her voice.
But dropping what I had I ran
to lay my cheek against her chest
and feel the notes through air and flesh,
the measure of the heart itself,
and drift away on melody
to my particular arcady.

Robert Morgan's most recent book of poems is *Terroir*. *The Road from Gap Creek*, his latest novel, is a sequel to the best-selling novel *Gap Creek*. A native of western North Carolina, he has taught at Cornell University since 1971.



"Appalachian Rivers, Lakes & Streams" (vol. 18, no. 1)

Gap Creek
Robert Morgan
Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2000

Though he teaches at Cornell University in New York, novelist and poet Robert Morgan has adopted none of contemporary fiction's mannered, middle-class academic angst. An old-fashioned writer, he sets his stories along the mountainous North Carolina/ South Carolina border where he grew up. He imagines Appalachians of a bygone day as steadfast, hardworking, honest, religious, and loving, with frailties and cruelties forgivable and forgiven.

Morgan's vision of Appalachian people is a romantic one, the flip side of familiar imaginings of the violence and evil, moonshine and madness in the mountains. Though his portrayal may be the kinder of the two, neither image does justice to mountain lives past or present. It can lead to the belief that it is desirable to emulate the past, but it's a past that never was.

In *Gap Creek,* vagueness about time contributes to an idealistic, once-upon-a-time quality. The story occurs sometime after the advent of trains and before cars. Morgan gives no news of the outside world, mentions no schools or newspapers, and notes few imported goods besides coffee, tea, sugar, and, of all things, coconut. That sense of self-sufficiency and isolation is a well-loved myth about a part of the country that has always been connected, in reality, to the economics and politics of the state, nation, and the world.

What saves Morgan's novel, his third, from a mawkish, Waltons/ Andy Griffith sentimentality is his gripping storytelling, an indelible sense of place, and the flesh-and-blood-and-guts subject matter. With a finely honed, no-extra-words narrative, Morgan turns the story of prosaic lives into a page-turner.

The very first lines uttered by Morgan's young narrator portend high drama: "I know about Masenier because I was there. I seen him die." High drama does indeed follow, though most of this story concerns a farm girl's narrow life: the planting and gathering of crops, clearing woods and making jelly— nothing extraordinary, except in the telling.

Masenier is the little brother of the teen-aged narrator, Julie, who tells her story in a simple but elegant dialect. She holds the little boy as he dies gruesomely of an intestinal parasite on the mountainside on a freezing winter night.

Julie is an exquisite storyteller, but she gives no sense of her own changes, remaining unsatisfyingly static. The death of her brother and, shortly afterwards, her father would in most stories mark the passage to adulthood, but Julie seems to have been born responsible and grownup, resigned to her fate. As the strongest of four girls in the family, she's a workhorse. "The job just fell to me, without anybody explaining why," she says of cutting firewood. "And since it had to be done, I done it, and kept on doing it."

That goes for all the outside work on the farm. She details her labors in an engaging dry-as-dust tone. She continues in the same unflappable style when describing the exciting moment that a handsome young stranger, Hank, sees her sweating at one end of a crosscut saw. Far from being put off by the activity Julie herself considers unfeminine, he angles for an invitation to call on her.

That suits Julie's modest ambition. "I knowed that more than anything in the world I wanted to be married to Hank Richards. I wanted to live in a house with just him and me, and I wanted to help him work in the fields and raise chickens and pick apples to dry in the sun for winter."

The dream is not destined to come true. Hank and Julie do marry and then walk over the hills carrying all they own to a farm on Gap Creek. There Julie keeps house for the cranky widower who owns the place, and Hank works making bricks for a new mill nearby.

It is an onerous life, but Julie simply gets on with it. When she causes a kitchen fire that results in the landlord's death, she experiences none of the anguish or guilt or nightmares that might beset a 17-year-old

survivor of such an ordeal. She remains as strong and practical as ever.

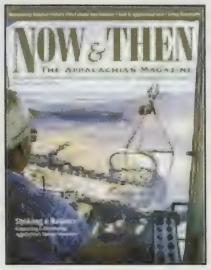
The strain begins to tell on Hank, though. He at least has recognizable emotions. When Julie falls for a scam, Hank hits his pregnant wife and calls her a "dumb heifer" in a predictable domestic violence sequence that has become a staple in books, movies, and television.

It's the only scene in the book that stood out to me as an overworked cliché. Unfortunately, as we know so well from all the facts that have come out about domestic violence, it's unrealistic to suppose that there would be just one incident of violence in this marriage: Abusers keep abusing. Yet Morgan implies that Hank has learned his lesson and will not strike his wife again. The author's own evidence does not support him. Hank has a nasty temper. He gets fired from his job, and employers blacklist him because of his outbursts. He is not quite the paragon Julie is.

The novelist obviously admires women. He favors hopeful brides as narrators in this novel as he has previously in *The Truest Pleasure* and in part of *The Hinterlands*. These women often describe birth as well as everyday chores in vivid detail. They are dignified, without resentment, restlessness, or curiosity about the wider world. Like Morgan's other heroines, Julie's spirituality, sense of duty, physical strength and beauty, patience, and—remarkably—her sexuality are all present and in proportion. This is the perfect woman.

When Julie and Hank leave Gap Creek wiser and more prepared, Hank—with his newfound religion and patience—joins Julie as a character too good to be true. A mountain mist softens the sharp image seen through Morgan's lens. Placing his characters on a pedestal, Morgan robs them of their complexities. Yet, in the hands of such a gifted storyteller, it is worthwhile to give way to the romance and, as simply as Robert Morgan does, to love and honor Julie and Hank and their brave, foolish start in their small world. ❖

Pat Arnow was editor of *Now & Then* from 1986 to 1994. She also was an editor at *Southern Exposure*, *In These Times*, and *Reader's Digest*. She currently resides on the Lower East Side of Manhattan with her husband Steven Giles.



"Striking a Balance"
(vol. 18, 3)

Prodigal Summer
Barbara Kingsolver
New York: HarperCollins, 2000

Just as surely as the return of a lush, verdant summer to the Southern Appalachians, Barbara Kingsolver was bound to write another novel—but what to do for an encore after the philosophically complex and critically acclaimed *Poisonwood Bible* of 1999?

The answer is *Prodigal Summer*, a novel more narrow in scope than its predecessor and possibly more flawed. Yet ultimately it is just as satisfying as, well, a warm summer day spent near the novel's setting of "the limestone river cliffs along the Virginia-Kentucky border."

Much has been made by other reviewers of Kingsolver's return in this latest novel to her Kentucky roots as well as to her environmental, even eco-feminist interests. So while the setting is not as sweepingly international and political as in *Poisonwood Bible*, it will be familiar, certainly, to readers of *Now & Then*. Even if readers have never heard of the tiny town of Zebulon, Ky., where the novel's characters reside, they will recognize references to Roanoke, Va., where one of the characters goes for cancer treatments; to Knoxville, Tenn., mentioned in connection with Dixie Chicks concerts in the days before they hit the big time; and to "the entire border of the state of Tennessee... ringed with shacks advertising cheap fireworks."

Is this portrayal of our general region flattering or even accurate? Not always: Kingsolver, or at least her characters, occasionally reinforce regional stereotypes. One protagonist attempts "to reconcile a hillbilly accent with signs of a serious education." Another, "a dire outsider from the other side of the mountains, from *Lexington*—a place in the preposterous distance," struggles to understand the "nonsensical phrases" of mountain speech. It was, she concludes, "a whole different language from city speech."

As perhaps the above examples indicate, another potential flaw of the novel originates with its three rather unlovely protagonists, at least as they are when they begin their prodigal summer. Kingsolver has always tended toward didacticism, and here all of the main characters "grab . . . every opportunity as a pulpit," as one of her characters says of another.

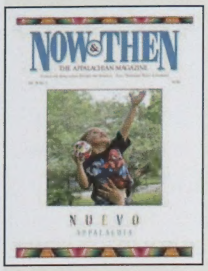
At the novel's outset, Kingsolver seems to be cycling through three separate stories, each individual's tale contained in chapters scattered throughout the book. All of the "Predators" chapters, for example, tell the story of Deanna Wolfe, a guardian of the forest atop Zebulon Mountain, a woman who is "used to being sure." Her chapters chronicle both her study and protection of a coyote family returning to the ecosystem and her summer fling with Eddie Bondo, a rancher and rambler from out West. That summer fling is vividly described. Surely the description of Deanna "want[ing] to stop and tear [Eddie] apart on the tail, swallow him alive, suck his juices, and lick him from her fingers" is worth the price of the book.

Down in the valley, the "Moth Love" chapters follow Lusa Maluf Landowski's concerns about how to befriend or even abide the "sorry-ass bumpkins" she must live near in return for her electric but troubled and, ultimately, short-lived marriage to Zebulon native Cole Widener. Across town, retired teacher and farmer Garnett is described in the chapters marked "Old Chestnuts" as being "secure in his understanding of what God's world did and did not mean to suggest." No wonder his organic-gardening, Unitarian-church-attending neighbor Nannie Rawley calls him a "sanctimonious old fart"—twice.

Yet meaningful novels are about the evolution of complex if flawed characters, and an observant reader can track the progress of the novel's characters through *Prodigal Summer*'s lushly beautiful world just as surely as Deanna tracks her coyotes, Lusa raises her goats, or Garnett cultivates his chestnut trees. The characters meet only in the most surprising of ways despite the limited size of their eco-system. (As an example: Readers should pay attention to the appearance of two green brocade armchairs.) Yet they come to an awareness and acceptance of all the species, especially Homo sapiens, in their shared world.

Most importantly, Kingsolver uses her flawed characters to emphasize one of her favorite themes: the importance of a created family. This distinction between "natural" parents (as in *naturally* good and nurturing) versus biological parents (connected to offspring by genetics but not by love) is a topic Kingsolver has explored ever since her first novel, *The Bean Trees*, published in 1988. Indeed, the end of *Prodigal Summer* is not spoiled for readers even if they already know that all three protagonists come to a clearer understanding of themselves as family members. So just as there's "always more to a story than a body can see from the fence line," there's more to *Prodigal Summer* than the initially cranky characters and silly stereotypes about hillbilly talk. Ultimately, the novel itself is prodigal, not in its humble return after squandering resources but in its literary richness as it rewards the reader who comes over the fence line, into the yard, and up onto the porch for an enjoyable read. ❖

Originally from Kansas City, Kathy Griffith Fish has taught at Cumberland College/University of the Cumberlands for more than 30 years.



"Nuevo Appalachia" (vol. 28, 1)

The Southern Poetry Anthology Volume III: Contemporary Appalachia
William Wright, Series Editor
Jesse Graves, Paul Ruffin, & William Wright, Volume Editors
Huntsville, TX: Texas Review Press, 2010

In his introduction to this collection, Jesse Graves, one of the book's editors, refers to the volume as "a snapshot album of a timeless place, as it is represented at the present moment." It is an apt description. The volume presents an expansive, representative collection of poems from eighty poets of Southern Appalachia. Their works offer vivid portraits of the character of the people, the importance of land and place, the value of memories and traditions, and the diversity of voices singing throughout the region. The anthology includes such well-established writers as Jeff Daniel Marion, Robert Morgan, Kathryn Stripling Byer, Ron Rash, Frank X Walker, and Ricardo Nazario y Colón as well as emerging poets: Melissa Range, Janice Townley Moore, and Charlotte Spencer.

One of the difficulties of compiling the volume was to identify which poets are truly Southern Appalachian. The editors widely chose to let the poets "self-identify," and so the reader takes on faith each poet's strong connection with Southern Appalachia. What evolves from the collection is a vibrant portrait of and testament to the diversity and power of the poetry currently being written in the region. It is an important volume both for the individual reader and for use in the classroom and poetry workshops.

The volume reveals that there are an impressive number of award-winning poets writing in Southern Appalachia, and it reveals the recurring themes which contemporary poets embrace: a love of and respect for the land and the natural world, the richness of the region's storytelling traditions, an abiding sense of humor, the history of struggle and exploitation of the land and its people, awareness of the passage of time and the inevitability of change, strength of character, and strong emotional connections to the region.

Poets Joseph Banthanti, Edison Jennings, and Maurine Manning evoke humor and the color of Appalachian voices. As Banthanti writes in his poem "The Vilas Flood": "whatever might dislodge from largesse and parsimony." The volume is rich in both masculine and feminine voices, older and younger poets, and a diversity of poetic styles. Poems by Linda Parsons Marion, Jane Sasser, and Rita Sims Quillen, for example, speak to us vividly about personal loss, the healing power of memory, and the strength of women's voices. There are poems rich in the natural life of the region: wild onions, black locust, goldenrod, kudzu, and ramps, as described by poet John Crutchfield, their feral smell tainting "both skin & breath for days."

Many poems tell of loss and the destruction of the land and its people, as in Connie Jordan Green's "Coal Mining Camp, Kentucky, 1935" and Jackson Wheeler's "The TVA Built a Dam," in which a multitude of different names is "submerged now, into one name."

Music figures strongly in this anthology. In "The Girl Singer," Marianne Worthington writes of a black Gibson guitar that "sounds lonesome as an old grave."

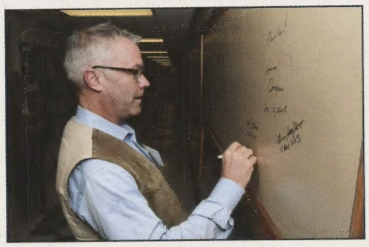
Several poems speak to religious heritage, as in Ted Olson's "Baptism" and Ron Rash's poem about a preacher who takes up serpents and concludes, "Only the serpents sense the truth."

In Robert Morgan's poem "Prophet," the speaker considers an ancient bristlecone pine that stands high on the ridge holding out a green arm "to pass on to the next eon / one word still spoken from the root." These words apply beautifully to the volume itself.

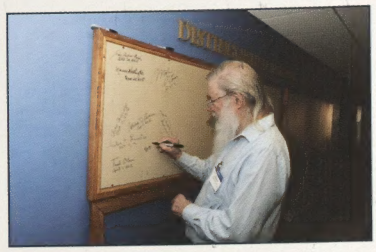
Ernest Lee is Professor Emeritus of English at Carson-Newman University where he also served as the Director of the Appalachian Center and Chair of Appalachian Studies from 2002-2013.

Signing Off

Sandy Ballard



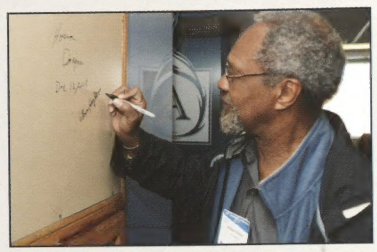
Chad Berry



George Brosi

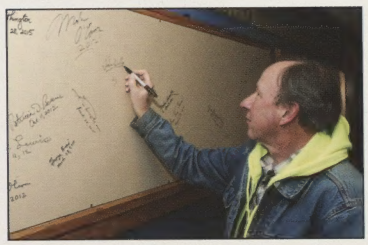
Judy Byers

Grace Toney Edwards



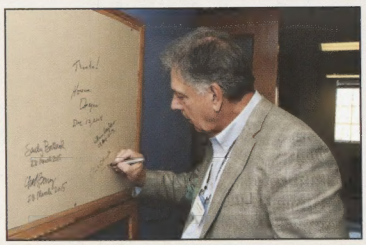
Wilburn Hayden

Michael Joslin

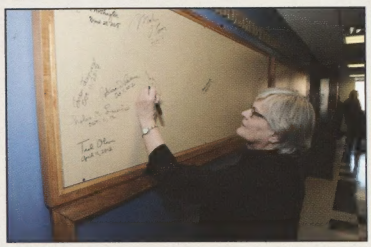


John Lilly

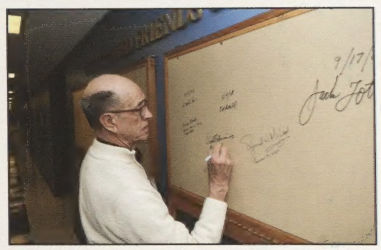
Marat Moore



Phil Obermiller



Anita Puckett



David Whisnant

During the 38th annual Appalachian Studies Association Conference, held at East Tennessee State University in March, thirteen attendees signed the Distinguished Friends of Appalachia wall at the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services. The signing recognizes social and cultural contributions to the region.

Marianne Worthington

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DANIEL
FOR NOW & THEN

Charlie Daniel is editorial cartoonist for the *Knoxville News Sentinel*. This cartoon was from *Now & Then*'s "The Greening of Appalachia" issue (Vol. 27, No. 1). It too is an editor's choice for "Best of."